

# The ambiguity of Plato's *Menexenus*: A school manifesto

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## Abstract

No general agreement has yet been reached about the meaning and purpose of Plato's *Menexenus*. Two mutually exclusive readings have generally been given: Socrates' funeral oration could be either a parody and a satire of Athens' funeral speeches or an example of better, idealistic, maybe even philosophically grounded rhetoric. However, the problem does not only come from the dichotomy present in most scholars' works. It lies, instead, in the ambiguity of the text itself. This paper aims to clarify the serious implications that parody can have. Exemplarity and parody, irony and seriousness should not be considered as mutually exclusive because an imitation that seriously demonstrates how easy it is to write a good epitaph can be understood as a form of parody. In fact, Plato's *Menexenus* seems to be a school manifesto: it recalls Callicles' charges against the educational value of philosophical practices (*Grg.* 484c-485d). Therefore, it may be directed against Isocrates' conception of rhetoric as related to education and politics. The mention of the Peace of Antalcidas (245c) will then prove the topical and thus political character of this work.

## Keywords

*Menexenus*; *Gorgias*; funeral speech; parody; rhetoric; school; Isocrates

## Introduction

No general agreement has yet been reached about the meaning and purpose of Plato's *Menexenus*. Despite differing opinions on the relationship between its framing dialogue and epitaph, the mimicry and criticism of funeral orations there contained has been generally accepted by modern scholars. Conversing with Menexenus, Socrates first criticizes harshly the institution of public funeral speech, but then offers an example of that kind of eulogy himself. This has led scholars to mutually exclusive interpretations differing on the crucial question regarding the presence of a serious tone in the epitaph or lack thereof.

According to some scholars, such as Pohlenz (1913), Méridier (1964) and Henderson (1975), the funeral speech has to be taken as an ironic extension of Socrates' critique, as an exemplification of the commonplaces widely used in democratic funeral speeches, as well as of the dangers and vacuity of rhetoric in general. A wide range of notions has been used to describe *Menexenus*' tendency: irony (Berndt 1881), parody (Dodds 1966), satire (Pohlenz 1913), παίγνιον (Ritter 1910), *pastiche* (Méridier 1964, Tsitsiridis 1998), *persiflage*.<sup>1</sup>

Wilamowitz (1920) has rather argued that Plato seriously meant the funeral speech as a demonstration of his superior rhetorical skills compared to contemporary rhetoricians, and that the preventive critique placed in front of it would be precisely due to the fact that its content is clothed in the form of such speeches. The idea has been developed by those who, like Pappas & Zelcer (2015), understand *Menexenus* as a philosophical attempt to reform and reformulate that genre, and the appearance of Pericles' funeral speech in Thucydides' narrative could have well teased Plato.<sup>2</sup> For many scholars Pericles seems in fact to be the main or even the only target of *Menexenus*.<sup>3</sup> Some of them, such as Kahn (1963), detect a parenetic and protreptic tendency, while others, like Loewenclau (1961) and Tulli (2003), argue that Plato represented an 'Athens' Idea' according to his own beliefs.

Exemplarity and parody, irony and seriousness would therefore seem mutually exclusive. However, this dichotomy leads to a somewhat incoherent or uneven impression.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, those who stress Socrates' highly satirical account of the bewitching effect of rhetoric (234c-235c), then can hardly find any spoor of irony in the final conso-

1 Often several notions have been used together: see Wendland (1890: p. 180). According to Berndt (1881: p. 59), it is a "specimen ironiae mimicae", composed "artis Gorgiae imitatione".

2 The idea of a challenge that aims at improving and completing Pericles' epitaph is already proven in Proclus (*In Parm.* 631,21-34 C.): Plato would have competed with Thucydides (πρὸς Θουκυδίδην ἀγωνιζόμενος) through an imitation that points to improvement (ἐπὶ τὸ τελειότερον προάγοντα τὴν μίμησιν) and completion (τὰ ἐλλείποντα προστιθέντα τοῖς ἐκείνων λόγοις). See also D. H. *Dem.* 23 (Θουκυδίδην παραμμούμενος), Hermog. *Meth.* 24, Anon. *Proleg. Phil. Plat.* (22,61-63 W.).

3 See for instance Labriola (1980).

4 Many felt an unbearable shift in tone between dialogue and funeral speech: see Ritter (1910: p. 487), Pohlenz (1913: p. 303), Lattanzi (1953: p. 303). Even between praise and consolation a shift to a graver register has been assumed, often without a proper explanation: cf. Kennedy (1963: p. 159), Henderson (1975: p. 45), Salkever (1993: p. 140).

lation (246a-249c) and are therefore obliged to undermine its value.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, those who pay attention just to the funeral speech have to disregard Socrates' outspokenly ironic praise of rhetoricians.<sup>6</sup> Since a lack of parody or satire in the prosopopoeia of the fallen (246d-248d) is widely accepted, how could it be possible to imagine a work written half as a parody and half not?<sup>7</sup> And considering that the content of the funeral speech is clearly suited in the style of Gorgias, it might be hard to understand why Plato embedded with such a derogatory dialogue a speech that he meant seriously.

## 1. The framing dialogue

A closer analysis of the framing dialogue reveals a tight connection to *Gorgias* and may answer the question whether Socrates' epitaph should be taken seriously or not. Socrates' charges can be summarized as follows: 1) The public funeral democratic character and the 'honourable death'-*topos* undo any difference between citizens, because they are praised for the qualities they partake of, but also for what they actually don't partake of (235a καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μὴ).<sup>8</sup> 2) Rhetorical devices and collective eulogies produce an ephemeral enchantment of empty grandeur. 3) Despite the conventional difficulty of *facta dictis exaequare*, the task is easy and does not require particular skill, for the speakers make use of speeches prepared in advance and because, even if improvisation is needed, the eulogy will always find a welcoming audience (235d).<sup>9</sup>

Socrates denounces a discrepancy between the alleged difficulty in finding words appropriate to the deeds and the actual ease in carrying out this task: "if a man contends in front of the very people whom he praises, it is no big deal to seem a fine speaker" (235d, cf. 236a).

Socrates implies that rhetoricians only flatter their public, and this is the general charge made in *Gorgias* against rhetoric, namely that it works just as *κολακεία*, which is,

5 See Méridier (1964: p. 72) and Clavaud (1980: p. 247).

6 See especially Pappas & Zelter (2015: pp. 5, 82).

7 This point is rightly stressed by Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 82).

8 Pericles (Th. II 42,3) makes a conscious use of that *topos* for community purposes. The expression καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μὴ is a reminiscence of Gorgias' epitaph (VS 82 B 6 τί γὰρ ἀπὴν τοῖς ἀνδράσι τοῦτοις ὧν δεῖ ἀνδράσι προσεῖναι; τί δὲ καὶ προσῆν ὧν οὐ δεῖ προσεῖναι;). Plato develops Gorgias' expression by reversing its meaning: if the fallen do not lack anything that must be owned nor possess anything that must not be owned, then all good can be said of them, καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μὴ.

9 The speaker's inadequacy to equal the deeds with his own words is a widely used *topos*, it works as *captatio benevolentiae*, and takes the form of a *recusatio*, cf. Th. II 35,1f., Lys. 2,1, D. 60,1, Hyp. 6,2, Isoc. 11,14, 74, 82. In *Menexenus*' prologue (236d-e) the elaborated antithesis of λόγος-ἔργον highly alludes to the one of Pericles (see Kahn 1963: p. 222, Tsitsiridis 1998: p. 180), but the meaning is subverted: the μνήμη and κόσμος of beautiful deeds (ἔργων εὖ πραχθέντων) can only be achieved with a well-made speech (λόγῳ καλῶς ῥηθέντι). This contrived confidence seems to satirize the common device of undervaluing speakers' own abilities and is coherent with Socrates' critique: an eloquent, confident speaker who praises his own citizens requires no excuse, for the task is actually easy. Plato therefore does not show "how much better rhetoric can be when philosophers produce it" (Pappas & Zelter 2015: p. 116), nor the λόγος-ἔργον reversal implies that "the philosopher is free from having to pretend that *logos* is empty" (*id.*: p. 121).

in Socrates' account, not a τέχνη but an ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή (463b). An indirect reference to Socrates' previous charges is made by Menexenus (235c ἀεὶ σὺ προσπαίζεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοὺς ῥήτορας), but the strongest connection with *Gorgias* lies in the very first lines: just like Callicles, Menexenus is willing to pursue "bigger things" (234a ἐπὶ τὰ μείζω, cf. *Grg.* 484c) – i.e. a career in politics – because he deems to have already completed his education (παίδευσις) and scientific studies (φιλοσοφία).

A sign of *Menexenus*' tendency lies where Socrates says that he fears Menexenus will laugh him to scorn if he will see an elder man like him playing as a child (236c ἀλλ' ἴσως μου καταγέλαση, ἂν σοι δόξω πρεσβύτης ὧν ἔτι παίζειν). The following image of Socrates dancing while taking off his coat may be comical, but above all suggests that παίζειν refers to an alien behaviour of Socrates, or an insignificant task without any value, namely the acting of the funeral oration. This is a plain reference to Callicles' charge against Socrates and the practice of philosophy (*Grg.* 485a): in Callicles' opinion, "it is fine to engage in philosophy as much as it is useful for education (ὅσον παιδείας χάριν), and for a young man it is not vile to follow it; but if a man already in his late years (ἡδὴ πρεσβύτερος ὧν) still practices it, the matter, Socrates, becomes risible (καταγέλαστον)". Callicles argues that if men do not engage in public life and still practice philosophy, "they will be completely unexperienced in human characters" (484d τῶν ἡθῶν παντάπασιν ἄπειροι).

It should therefore be clear that Callicles' allegations refer to a discussion on education. He argues that the practice of philosophy would be well-suited for a young man, but if one wants to pursue a career in politics, he needs to be taught in rhetoric, for it prepares to practical life. The young Menexenus is eager to ἄρχεῖν (234a), and therefore Socrates sets politics (ἐπὶ τὰ μείζω) against παίδευσις and φιλοσοφία, ironically estimating the first as "bigger" than the latter two.

It seems now useful to consider *Menexenus*' addressees: does it address a wide audience, i.e. the whole citizenship (as argued by those who consider it a political *pamphlet*), or an absolutely restricted public which can grasp every allusion, or rather those young people who wish to perfect their education, as the title itself suggests? Plato's *Menexenus* seems related to a genre which depicts young aristocrats who are too confident in their skills and too eager for ἄρχεῖν. In fact, we know of other works devoted to Menexenus,<sup>10</sup> and a conversation between Socrates and a young, bold Glaucon (*Xen. Mem.* III 6) fits quite well the current discussion: pressed by Socrates, Glaucon is forced to admit his total lack of preparation in terms of armies, finances, and charisma. Socrates, after having diverted the young man from dedicating himself too soon to a political career, advises him to be careful not to fall, out of a desire for glory (III 6,16 τοῦ εὐδοξεῖν ἐπιθυμῶν), into its opposite.

The cultural panorama provided by Plato's *Menexenus* involves eminent political leaders (Archinus, Dion, Pericles), teachers of dubious and undoubted reputation (Aspasia,

10 A *Menexenus* was written by Glaucon, Plato's elder brother (cf. D. L. II 124) and Antisthenes (*SSR* V/A XXXVI *Μενέξενος ἢ περὶ τοῦ ἄρχεῖν*, cf. D. L. VI 18). Whether Plato's *Menexenus* replied, or inspired these works, is impossible to say. Certainly later is Aristotle's *Menexenus* (D. L. V 22). Also Philon Megarius wrote a *Menexenus* (*SSR* II/F VI *ap. Clem. Al. Strom.* IV 19,121,5).

Connus, Antiphon, Lamprus), while the addressee is Menexenus, young heir of an illustrious Athenian family (234b). The young age of Menexenus, his inclinations towards politics and his assumption to be already prepared in παιδείσις and φιλοσοφία strongly suggest to consider education, rhetoric teachers, politics and command as themes and targets of Plato's *Menexenus*.

The thematic coherence with *Gorgias* and the clear disregard of oratory practice can hardly support a philosophical interpretation. It seems therefore unlikely to assume that παίζειν refers to Socratic irony, as Kahn (1963: p. 226) and Tsitsiridis (1998: pp. 66-67) do. The opening dialogue does not contain any evidence of the will to reform funeral orations. Besides being short and ornamental, the closing conversation appears aporetic, i.e. it does not seem to have any further meaning to be drawn from it. As Oppenheimer (1933: p. 72) pointed out, Menexenus' evaluation of the speech is essentially "bewundernd und anerkennend", and does not contain Plato's real belief, as Wilamowitz (1920: p. 141) expected. The final section does not aim at belittling the worth of Socrates' speech, as one may assume from Socrates' opening critique. It just proves that Socrates has spoken in a way convenient to the occasion, just as Agathon did (*Smp.* 198a πεπόντως).

That *Menexenus* does not claim the need for philosopher-rulers, as instead Coventry (1989) suggested, is clear from how Menexenus answers Socrates (234b): ἐὰν σύ γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἕξῃ καὶ συμβουλευῆς ἄρχειν, προθυμήσομαι· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐ ("Socrates, if you allow and advise me to govern, I will govern; if not, I will not"). "Die plumpe Ehrerbietigkeit" (Schleiermacher 1861: p. 261) that Menexenus would show towards Socrates has led some to believe that *Menexenus* is spurious, or at least that the young man is heavily mocked (Nannini 2014: p. 265). More than deference, one could speak of indifference. The superiority of philosophical education is implicit from the very beginning, when Socrates asks the young man if he really believes to be at the end of his education. It is implicit, not discussed: the theoretical bases of criticism are to be found in *Gorgias*, to which *Menexenus* might serve as an ironic, explanatory counterpoint.<sup>11</sup>

However, an overall evaluation of *Menexenus*' tendency cannot be drawn without a proper analysis of the speech itself, since it seems to be lacking in evident parodic techniques, such as distortion, inversion and amplification.

## 2. The funeral oration

The wide, florid, and introductory section on autochthony (237b-238b) works as pivot for the entire speech and arises again in those very places suspected of (perhaps bitter) irony. The criterion of praise for the fallen is "according to nature" (237a κατὰ φύσιν). The relevance of this parameter has been often disregarded, though it widely departs from the common arguments of praise, namely the virtue and courage of the fallen,

11 "A playful appendix", according to Dodds (1966: p. 24).

their attachment to the city, Athens' generosity and moral superiority, etc.<sup>12</sup> One could infer Socrates' seriousness from the importance that Plato recognised to founding myths (*Criti.* 109b-d, *Ti.* 23e-24c, *Sph.* 247c, *Plt.* 269b-271c), and in fact *Menexenus* seems to recall the "noble lie" (*R.* 414b-415e), where equality of birth is merged with a merit-based hierarchy. Even though the autochthony theme and the assimilation of Attica to a mother are widely used commonplaces,<sup>13</sup> the brotherhood and consequent equality among citizens are stressed in both myths (237c, 239a μιάς μητρός πάντες ἀδελφοὶ φύντες, cf. *R.* 415a πάντες οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀδελφοί), despite coexisting with a pyramidal social organisation. In *Menexenus*' praise of Athenian constitution, which is surprisingly defined as ἀριστοκρατία, the goodness of the constitutional form would be due to equality of birth (238e ἡ ἐξ ἴσου γένεσις), and the natural factor of birth equality would lead to legal equality (239a ἡ ἰσογονία ἡμᾶς ἡ κατὰ φύσιν ἰσονομίαν ἀναγκάζει ζητεῖν κατὰ νόμον). However, he "rules and governs who is deemed to be wise and good" (238d ὁ δόξας σοφὸς ἢ ἀγαθὸς εἶναι κρατεῖ καὶ ἄρχει). People are subordinate to the "reputation for virtue and practical wisdom" (239a ἀρετῆς δόξη καὶ φρονήσεως). In comparison to tyrannies and oligarchies, Athenians do not treat themselves as δοῦλοι or δεσπότες (238e), and this will be also the behaviour of *kallipolis*' people (*R.* 463a).

These comparisons seem to be sufficient enough to rule out the possibility of a mere imitation, i.e. a school exercise, and may show how much relevant for Plato was a mythical foundation. They also may support the view that Plato set here some of his own beliefs. However, an extended praise of Athenian noble origins may well have been the normal habit in funeral orations, since Pericles' extremely brief reference to the *topos* and his *praeteritio* on Athenian deeds (*Th.* II 36) serve to highlight his departure from more traditional speeches. Furthermore, a deep philosophical meaning seems unlikely. The insistent imitation of the forensic habit of seeking argumentative evidence plays against a serious reading (237c-238a): μαρτυρεῖ ... δεύτερος δὲ ἔπαινος ... μέγα δὲ τεκμήριον ... ἱκανὸν τεκμήριον ... τοιαῦτα τεκμήρια. Rhetorical devices find a peak in the elaborate sentence οὐ γὰρ γῆ γυναῖκα μεμίμηται κυήσει καὶ γεννήσει, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ γῆν (238a): the antimetabole γῆ γυναῖκα ... γυνὴ γῆν is reinforced by the alliteration of |γ| and by the homeoteleuton κυήσει ... γεννήσει. Furthermore, the ἔρις and κρίσις of the gods (237c) are cited as proof of divine love for Attica, but they are denied in *Criti.* 109b. The divine contention for the possession of Attica belongs in fact to the encomia-repertoire,<sup>14</sup> and therefore proves the lack of a truly platonic thought.

Moreover, the resumption of autochthony motifs elsewhere in *Menexenus* should cast a shadow about Plato's alleged seriousness. They occur not only in the praise of Athenian constitution, where Pericles' funeral oration is clearly hinted. In fact, the moderation that Athenians would have proven after the fall of the Thirty Tyrants would be due to ἡ τῷ ὄντι συγγένεια, φιλίαν βέβαιον καὶ ὁμόφυλον οὐ λόγῳ ἀλλ' ἔργῳ παρεχομένη (244a). The συγγένεια which would have fostered a mild and moderate reconciliation sounds at least

12 See Ziolkowski (1981: p. 134).

13 Cf. e.g. Hdt. VII 161,3, Ar. V. 1076, Eur. *Ion* 589f., *Th.* I 2,5, II 36,1, *Lys.* 2,17-19, *Isoc.* 11,24f., 21,124, 17,49, D. 60,4. As for the comparison of Attica to a mother, see *Isoc.* 11,25, 21,90, 16,108, *Plat. R.* 470d.

14 Cf. *Isoc.* 11,29 ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν οὐ μόνον θεοφιλῶς ἀλλὰ καὶ φιλανθρώπως ἔσχευ.



ironic, if not profoundly bitter. It is true that after the fall of the Thirty the outgoing party actually behaved moderately in battle,<sup>15</sup> and that the slogan of the winners was appeasement and reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> But the reconciliation with those of Eleusis was conducted far from μετρίως (244a), it was a traitorous slaughter.<sup>17</sup> It is unlikely that the συγγένεια-theme, and therefore the *firm* character of φιλία, depends on mere conventionality, or sincere idealisation: a little further on, where the *firm* refusal of Athens to the peace of Antalcidas (a peace that Athens actually agreed to) is praised, the motif of Athens' noble freedom returns, which is healthy, *firm*, and naturally hostile to Barbarians (245c τὸ γε τῆς πόλεως γενναῖον καὶ ἐλεύθερον βέβαιόν τε καὶ ὑγίης καὶ φύσει μισοβάρβαρον). The Athenian nature would be so purely Hellenic (245d) that Athens alone would not have agreed to take the oath. It is not a question of replacing the truth with a nobler, albeit insincere image of Athens that can serve as an inspiring model, as Kahn (1963: p. 225) suggested. Plato seems to reuse sarcastically the well-known *topos* of Athenians' autochthony: the Athenian nature would be so pure and its character so firmly φύσει μισοβάρβαρος that Athens has paradoxically accepted to sign a peace completely unbalanced towards the interests of the Persians!

The countless readings given to the *politeia* section (238b–239a) reveal once more *Menexenus*' ambiguity. The δόξαντες ἄριστοι (238d) may forerun the ἄρχοντες of *Republic*,<sup>18</sup> or reveal not so much Plato's real judgment about the Athenian constitution, but, instead, his own political aspiration directed to the citizenship.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, the “Durcheinanderwirbelung der staatsrechtlichen Begriffe”<sup>20</sup> would prove Plato's satire. However, while the upheaval of actual power relations has been understood just as “Provokation”,<sup>21</sup> the enigmatic, unexpected and embarrassing definition of “an aristocracy with popular approval” (238d μετ' εὐδοξίας πλῆθους ἀριστοκρατία) has been also regarded as an “Idealisierung der attischen Verfassung”.<sup>22</sup>

The overall meaning of the *politeia*'s depiction seems to be, however, a fine and sly lengthening of Pericles' praise of Athenian constitution. Both Pericles and Plato deal with its name and implications (Th. II 37,1 ὄνομα μὲν ... δημοκρατία κέκληται· μέτεστι δὲ ... πᾶσι τὸ ἴσον, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν κτλ., cf. 238d καλεῖ δὲ ὁ μὲν αὐτὴν δημοκρατίαν, ὁ δὲ ἄλλο ... ἔστι δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ κτλ.), but while Pericles accepts the name of democracy and clarifies some correctives that distinguish it from ochlocracy, Plato directly rejects that

15 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* II 4,19.

16 See Cleocritus' speech in Xen. *Hell.* II 4,20–22.

17 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* II 4,43.

18 Wilamowitz (1920: p. 132).

19 Kahn (1963: p. 226).

20 Pohlenz (1913: p. 245).

21 Heitsch (2009: p. 233).

22 Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 227). The exact meaning of εὐδοξία is unclear. Its general and most common meaning is 'good repute', 'honour', cf. Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 224): “[eine Aristokratie] mit dem guten Ruf der Menge”. Relying on *Men.* 98b–99b, some scholars translate it with 'good judgement', 'correct opinion', cf. Labriola (1980: p. 210): “una aristocrazia fondata sul buon giudizio della massa”. The majority of scholars understands it as 'approval', cf. Kahn (1963: p. 222): “an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude”. I hope to clarify the meaning of this word and its implications in another contribution.

name and calls it an aristocracy, i.e. the rule of the best. If Pericles, against the partisan meaning, entrusts δημοκρατία with the value of 'government of the whole people', Plato sets πλῆθος against δημοκρατία, which therefore means 'the government of the poor'. Pericles welcomes the word democracy, but strives to show that geometric, not arithmetic, equality prevails in the office assignment. In fact, Pericles affirms equal rights (τὸ ἴσον) in the private sphere – and so does Plato, since the ἰσογονία κατὰ φύσιν is said to imply an ἰσονομία κατὰ νόμον – but with respect to public consideration (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξιωσιν), regarding the prestige one may gain in any field (ὥς ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ εὐδοκίμῳ), everyone is preferred to public service (προτιμᾶται, cf. 238d τετίμηται) not for lineage (ἀπὸ μέρους) more than for merit (ἀπ' ἀρετῆς).

Pericles speaks of reputation (ὥς ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ εὐδοκίμῳ), and yet the reference to reputation (i.e. appearance/opinion) ceases to exist when he states that everyone is preferred according to a meritocratic principle (ἀπ' ἀρετῆς). In other words, Pericles implies that the *granted* ἀρετή would also be *possessed*. Plato develops this implicit statement by affirming that the very existence of ἀριστοκρατία depends on the εὐδοξία of πλῆθος, which assigns the offices τοῖς ἀεὶ δόξασιν ἀρίστοις (238d).<sup>23</sup> The threefold occurrence of δοκεῖν (238d [2x], 239a) highlights how arbitrary is the merit-based principle in Pericles' speech. If the people really had a correct opinion, Plato seems to say, an ἀριστοκρατία could indeed be realized.

The "preference" (προτιμᾶται) granted to merit in Pericles' speech then becomes in Plato's rendering a constitutional element, since the πλῆθος is sovereign (ἐγκρατές) and therefore can assign power and political offices to whomever it may deem to be the best. Therefore, the merit-based principle praised by Pericles turns into Plato's δόξαντες ἄριστοι, i.e. an alleged ἀριστοκρατία.<sup>24</sup> Pericles strives to reformulate in a democratic view the aristocratic, merit-based principle, while he hides public consideration – i.e. appearance – behind it. Pericles' merit-based system seems to be innate in the Athenian φύσις, and therefore Plato transformed this natural peculiarity into a constitution based on law.

*Menexenus' politeia* is nothing more than the natural extension of Pericles' implicit message. By making explicit these implicit words, Plato made evident the mystifying character of Pericles' praise. By adhering to the genre conventions, Plato reused Periclean vocabulary to affirm its seclusion from reality. This confirms the duplicity that structures Plato's *Menexenus*: respect for tradition and traditional themes on the one hand, allusive criticism *e contrario* on the other.

Both serious and parodic readings recognise the tendentiousness of the historical account (239a-246a), since it may well be interpreted in both ways. According to Wilamow-

23 According to Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 231), since "δοκεῖν ist das Verbum, das man gewöhnlich in Zusammenhang mit einer Wahl oder einer Entscheidung des Volkes gebraucht", the verb would not really contain a polemic allusion to the distinction between *being* and *appearing*. The effort shown in removing any form of malice seems unconvincing. Even if δοκεῖν refers to the popular sanction, the irony remains: the people have *agreed* who are the best, that is, they have *concurred* who they *hold* to be the best.

24 The statement lengthens Thucydides' judgement of Pericles' influence: "what was a democracy by name, *de facto* was the government by the first citizen" (II 65,9 ἐγίγνετό τε λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή). That Thucydides depicted Pericles' institutional role as aristocratic, is proven also by Plutarch (*Per.* 9,1 Θουκυδίδης μὲν ἀριστοκρατικὴν τινὰ τὴν τοῦ Περικλέους ὑπογράφει πολιτείαν).



itz (1920: p. 135), Plato took his stand on Athens' politics, giving to it "Richtungslinien". According to others, the section has to be taken as a celebration of the ideal behaviour that Athens should have had in foreign policies,<sup>25</sup> perhaps turned into criticism to spur the city to be worthy of such a nobler version of itself.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, this section may just exemplify the habits of official rhetoric, which distorts history through exaggerations, subversions and deliberate omissions.<sup>27</sup>

However, both readings seem inappropriate for at least two reasons. It has often been wrongly assumed that misstatements, exaggerations, and silences derive from precise choices, i.e. there is a certain meaning to be drawn from them. Conversely, a satirical tendency has been detected thanks to modern historical knowledge. In other words, the historical account has been read through the eyes of a modern historian. It has been rightly stated that a fair amount of misstatements may be unintentional, and, therefore, they can just show that *Menexenus* is a funeral oration, and not an historical research. In fact, it is possible to judge historical discrepancies just on the basis of the sources known at that time, and one has to be careful not to overlook the peculiarities of this genre, since it conveys Athens' official, therefore positive version of its history.<sup>28</sup> From the mere presence of inaccuracies nothing can be drawn, beside the fact that they mimic widely used themes.

If Plato adopts a well-established practice and does really mimic rhetorical embellishments of history, however, it is unlikely to assume a serious aim for such distortions. However, many felt that Plato amplifies and deliberately exaggerates the inaccuracies and revisions of Athenian eulogies.<sup>29</sup> In fact, *Menexenus* seems to contain statements too gross and too evident to be dismissed just as imitation. Therefore, a proper evaluation of the chosen events, of the way they are presented, and of the reasons for which they are recalled is essential.

There are surely some arguments which may support a serious reading. Since the mythical deeds are mentioned just in the form of *praeteritio* (239b), a satire *stricto sensu* can be ruled out here. In fact, they belong to the most traditional themes of Athenian encomia and might be surely enlarged and enriched, as Lysias' funeral speech and Isocrates' *Panegyricus* show.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the particular emphasis with which is exalted the value of Marathon (240c-e) – a field battle, and not a naval one – is consistent with Plato's judgment expressed much later in *Lg.* 707c. An aristocrat like Plato could only blame the naval, i.e. democratic, policies of Athens. Another consistency may be found in the panhellenic character of Socrates' historical account. Athens' generosity towards other Greeks is based on the principle that against people of the same blood one fights

25 Scholl (1959), Loewenclau (1961), Tulli (2003).

26 Kahn (1963).

27 Among the others, Berndt (1881), Wendland (1890), Pohlenz (1913), Taylor (1960), Méridier (1964), Moggi (1968), Henderson (1975).

28 These points are rightly stressed by Kahn (1963: p. 225) and Tsitsiridis (1998: pp. 74-76).

29 See for instance Henderson (1975: p. 39) and Trivigno (2009: p. 38).

30 Cf. Arist. *Rh.* II 1396a 12-14, Lys. 2,4-6, 7-10, 11-16, Isoc. 11,54-65, 68-70, D. 60,8 and Pohlenz (1913: p. 275).

until victory (242d τὸ ὁμόφυλον μέχρι νίκης δεῖν πολεμεῖν), against the Barbarian, instead, until destruction. Athens took on countless conflicts “in its own interest and that of all who speak the same language” (242a). This is consistent with Plato’s distinction between πόλεμος and στάσις in *R.* 469b–471e: regarding the principles that will shape *kallipolis*’ art of warfare, Plato sharply distinguishes between πόλεμος, which pertains to the alien and foreign domain (ἄλλότριον καὶ ὀθνεῖον), and στάσις (i.e. νόσος), which pertains to the friendly and familiar one (οἰκεῖον καὶ συγγενές). *Kallipolis*’ inhabitants will maintain a reconciliation perspective with their enemies and the punishment will not turn into enslavement or extermination (471a οὐκ ἐπὶ δουλείᾳ κολάζοντες οὐδ’ ἐπ’ ὀλέθρῳ). Greeks must not fight other Greeks in the same way as they do towards Barbarians, since the Greeks are by nature their enemies. Moreover, Plato’s originality has to be noted. The account of Persian growth and the Eretria-episode (239d–240c), which recurs also in *Lg.* 698c–e, do not seem to belong to the epitaph-repertoire.

However, it has not been sufficiently noticed that, in the Persian growth’s section, the δουλεία theme recurs insistently as a consequence of the enlargement of Persians’ ἐλευθερία and therefore ἀρχή.<sup>31</sup> It has been rightly stated that *Menexenus*’ historical account seems to contain no mention of Athenian ἀρχή (which is, instead, proudly praised by Lysias),<sup>32</sup> probably because Plato could have had nothing but words of reproach. But if not to Athens, to which city are the words about Darius’ kingdom suited, “with ships [he] controlled the sea and the islands, so that he believed he had no antagonist of equal value”?<sup>33</sup> Does it not resonate here Pericles’ proud claim that Athens forced πᾶσαν μὲν θάλασσαν καὶ γῆν ἐσβατὸν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τόλμῃ (Th. II 41,4)? If this reading is right, then we have to conclude that an allusion to Athenian ‘imperialism’ is present, though referred to the Persian kingdom, as well as a devaluation of an ἀρχή that generates enslavement. In fact, the closer the account comes to the disgraceful peace of Antalcidas, the more the δουλεία theme recurs.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, some statements about the period 404–386 are too bold to be dismissed as simple imitation. Athens would have won οὐ μόνον τὴν τότε ναυμαχίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄλλον πόλεμον (243d) – i.e. the Peloponnesian War – because “we have been defeated by our own internal dissension (διαφορά), not by the others: therefore we are still to this day (ἔτι καὶ νῦν) undefeated by them, and we ourselves have both defeated and been defeated by ourselves”. Thucydides too links the cause of Athenian defeat to internal disagreements (II 65,12). In *Menexenus*’ account, however, the internal διαφορά would be the reason why Athens *cannot* be regarded as defeated. It would be Athens itself that caused its own end,

31 239d δουλόμενος, *ibid.* ἡ Ἀσία ἐδούλευε, *ibid.* Κύρος ἐλευθέρωσας Πέρσας ... Μήδους ἐδουλώσατο, 239e τὴν ἀρχὴν ὥριστο, 240a γυνῶμαι δεδουλωμένοι, *ibid.* καταδεδουλωμένη ἦν ἡ Περσῶν ἀρχή.

32 Lys. 2,47, 55, cf. Isoc. 11,106 and Kahn (1963: p. 225).

33 240a ναυοὶ δὲ τῆς τε θαλάττης ἐκράτει καὶ τῶν νήσων, ὥστε μηδὲ ἀξιοῦν ἀντίπαλον αὐτῷ μηδὲνα εἶναι.

34 244c Ἑλλῆσι πρὸς ἀλλήλων δουλόμενοι, 244d καταδουλοῦσθαι τοὺς ἄλλους, 244e τὸ μηδενὶ δουλόμενον βοηθεῖν, 245a ἀπελύσατο δουλείας, *ibid.* ἐλευθέρους εἶναι μέχρι οὐ πάλιν αὐτοὶ αὐτοὺς κατεδουλώσαντο. Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 79), although he refuses the satirical reading of Pohlenz, admits the presence of “eine gewisse Bitterkeit (jedoch ohne Ironie)” in the words βασιλέα ἐλευθέρωσαντες (246a). According to him, *all* the Athenians would be praised, *regardless of* where (or for whom) they have fought. However, the ‘regardless of’ itself is coherent with Socrates’ critique and therefore plays in favour of a bitter irony.

which would depend on no one else but itself. Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 327) finds the reasoning “sophistisch”. It would be equally sophistic to recall the distinction between πόλεμος and στάσις (*R.* 469b–471e) as an ‘excuse’ for this rather hyperbolic statement. Athenian solitude at war is a commonplace which underlines Athenian courage and credits towards the other Greeks,<sup>35</sup> and Plato seems to force this *topos* to absurdity.

The topical character of Plato’s *Menexenus* is proved not only by these bold statements, but also by their connection to the present situation. Athens would have won the Peloponnesian War and therefore would have been “still undefeated to this day”. Athenian aristocracy is praised because of its continuity, since it “still exists in present times”.<sup>36</sup> Even those who regard the praise of *politeia* as idealisation recognise that these emphatic references to the present play against a sincere depiction of Plato’s beliefs or aspirations.<sup>37</sup> Plato could have well avoided such striking references, and yet he did not do so. The historical account therefore proves how much topical the *Menexenus* is.

The final exhortation and consolation (246a–249c) have been often regarded as the most ‘truly Platonic’ section of the whole speech. Dionysius (*Dem.* 30), whose judgement on the *incipit* is rather severe, reports favourably an entire passage (246c–248e). Even though some scholars recognised the traditional character of moral prescriptions and therefore excluded a purely philosophical content,<sup>38</sup> there seems to be general agreement in considering this section truly worthy of Plato. Since exhortation and consolation might fit a philosophical treatment of virtue and pain, then Plato would have had more freedom and familiarity in dealing with such topics in his own fashion.<sup>39</sup> If Méridier (1964: p. 72)<sup>40</sup> had to undermine their value in accordance with his reductive reading, a shift to a graver tone has been often assumed without a proper explanation, namely without considering that «a shift in tone is just what one would expect when moving from celebration and praise to consolation and exhortation».<sup>41</sup>

35 See Ziolkowski (1981: p. 135).

36 238c ἡ γὰρ αὕτη πολιτεία καὶ τότε ἦν καὶ νῦν, ἀριστοκρατία, ἐν ἣ νῦν τε πολιτευόμεθα καὶ τὸν αἰὲ χρόνον ἐξ ἐκείνου ὡς τὰ πολλά.

37 See Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 87): “Diese direkte Bezugnahme auf die Gegenwart, die ins Auge springt, hätte der Autor vermeiden können, indem er einen mildereren oder allgemeineren Ausdruck benutzt hätte”.

38 Cf. Blass (1874: p. 435), Berndt (1881: p. 55), Pohlenz (1913: p. 292), Wilamowitz (1920: p. 137).

39 See Wendland (1890: p. 192), Ritter (1910: p. 496), Pohlenz (1913: p. 292), Kahn (1963: p. 229), Monoson (1998: p. 502), Eucken (2003: p. 54).

40 “La richesse des idées dans la παραμυθία est plus apparente que réelle”. On the contrary, Pohlenz (1913: p. 293) sees even here a “satirische Beziehung” and detects in the closing section a critical allusion to city’s shortcomings towards the families affected by the loss. References to the awareness of special care granted by the city (248d νῦν δὲ ἴσμεν ὅτι κτλ., 249e ἴστε ποῦ κτλ.) may arouse the suspicion that, in reality, Plato would denounce a lack of the city. In an apparently autonomous way Huby (1957: p. 113) came to the same conclusion, and the idea was also welcomed by Kahn (1963: p. 234 n. 28) and Trivigno (2009: p. 44). It is however unlikely to regard *Menexenus* as a ‘leading article’ of Plato on specific laws, at least because that concern would make the nephew of Critias, so to speak, a ‘socialist’.

41 Trivigno (2009: p. 41).

The speaker addresses the living with words<sup>42</sup> that recall Socrates' solemn oath,<sup>43</sup> and, at least from Wilamowitz (1920: p. 137) on, this was taken as a proof of Plato's seriousness. However, the speaker exhorts here the living to military excellence (εἶναι ὡς ἀρίστους), and not to practice philosophy, as Socrates did in *Apology* (φιλοσοφῶν). Another consistency with Plato's conception of virtue has been found in the consolation of the parents, where the need to contain affections and grief is stressed several times.<sup>44</sup> According to the speaker, whoever makes all that bring about happiness depend on himself, and whose life does not depend on the others, he has the best preparation for life, and he alone can be regarded as σώφρων, ἀνδρεῖος, φρόνιμος (248a). These ideas are consistent with the behaviour of an ἐπιεικὴς ἀνὴρ (*R.* 387d-e, cf. 603e).

However, the overall argument is rather traditional, if not properly archaic. The pivot of parents' consolation is the Delphic maxim μηδὲν ἄγαν (247e), which is also the core of a famous piece of Archilocus (fr. 13 W.<sup>2</sup>). In comparison with other classical funeral orations, Plato made here a larger use of highly ancient and archaic conceptions. No wonder that Plato could share such traditional thoughts.

In fact, exhortation is shaped in a fashion which recalls heroic values. The προαίρεσις of the fallen is based on the shame that would have come down to their lineage if they had not carried out their duty (246d),<sup>45</sup> while Pericles' development of such theme (*Th.* II 42,2f.) highlights a constant interaction, a strong bond between Athens and its citizens. They are tied in a mutual reliance represented by the "contribution" (ἔρανος, 43,1) given freely and without any further interest by the fallen to the city. *Menexenus* shows, on the contrary, that Athens plays no role in the choice of the fallen. And in this silence, perhaps, lies the meaning of this section.

Lineage permeates the ethical code of archaic honour, for the individual existence is recognised only as a part of a family organism, whose origins are lost in myth and whose future ideally must not come to end. For this reason, fame is not so much a personal possession as a common θησαυρός (247b). Not to spend ancestors' noble store, but rather to increase and deliver it to the descendants is the duty which the children must accomplish for their fallen fathers.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the ἀρετή of the ancestors (i.e. *genos*) constitutes the benchmark according to which the ἀρετή of the family members is judged. A metaphorical contest based on virtue reflects one of the leading ideas of archaic thought and is well set out in the solemn speech between Odysseus and his son (*Od.* XXIV 506-515). Telemachus must not disgrace his *genos* showing cowardice, and Laertes calls the con-

42 246b ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτός, ὃ παῖδες ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν, νῦν τε παρακελεύομαι καὶ ἐν τῷ λοιπῷ χρόνῳ, ὅπου ἂν τῷ ἐντυχάνω ὑμῶν, καὶ ἀναμνήσω καὶ διακελεύσομαι προθυμεῖσθαι εἶναι ὡς ἀρίστους.

43 *Ap.* 29d ἔωσπερ ἂν ἐμπνέω καὶ οἶός τε ὦ, οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενός τε καὶ ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτῳ ἂν αἰεὶ ἐντυχάνω ὑμῶν, λέγων κτλ.

44 247c ὡς ῥᾶστα φέρειν τὴν συμφορὰν, 247d φέροντες μὲν ἀνδρείως τὰς συμφοράς, 248a οὔτε γὰρ χαίρων οὔτε λυπούμενος ἄγαν φανήσεται, 248c κούφως δὲ καὶ μετρίως (*scil.* φέροντες τὰς συμφοράς).

45 The προαίρεσις is a rhetorical theme aimed at stressing the brave choice of the fallen, cf. *Lys.* 2,24-26, 62 and *D.* 60,26-28.

46 Cf. *Il.* VI 208f. αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων, / μηδὲ γένος πατέρων αἰσχυνέμεν. See also *Isoc.* 4,29.

test a δῆρις περὶ ἀρετῆς. The future existence of *genos* ideally depends on how deserving Telemachus will prove to his father.

Pericles too makes use of a metaphorical contest (45,1 ὁρῶ μέγαν τὸν ἀγῶνα). However, the ἀρετὴ of the fallen is judged as it beseems Athens' dignity (43,1 προσηκόντως τῇ πόλει). *Menexenus* shows a rather different ethic, which is based on lineage conceptions. The merit of the living is no longer assigned in accordance with public consideration and common utility, but rather with an afterlife perspective (246d, 247c, 248c). Therefore, no further speculations on the philosophical meaning of this section are needed. It seems that Plato selected the very core of heroic ethic in order to give to his funeral speech all the dignity it deserved.

To summarise, serious readings are right in denying that Plato offered a mere imitation of funeral speeches, because Plato's purposes might be underestimated. Moreover, the many parallels might confirm this view, but inferring from them some positive content seems wrong. From such similarities it is possible to infer only that Plato shared certain ideas, such as the importance of a founding myth, the need for greater cohesion between Greek *poleis*, the heroic and archaic ethic of virtue as honour and courage, and the control of excessive grief. A philosophical or pedagogical intent has been often sought – or even applied *a priori* – by softening Socrates' ironic behaviour, and, therefore, by 'naturalising' *Menexenus* in Plato's philosophical system. However, this "injection massive de conceptions philosophiques ou de préjugés historiques"<sup>47</sup> is not based on the text, but in comparison only with other dialogues. A positive content, on the other hand, might be justified by the opening of Plato's Academy, which was possibly established a few years earlier,<sup>48</sup> and a serious reading seems to be shared by some ancient authors.

The ironic reading rightly leads to carefully consider the implicit relations with the genre and its conventions. It points out the significant number of rhetorical devices and therefore the imitation of Gorgias' style. It stresses the mockery of rhetorical practices in the opening dialogue. It suggests being cautious in identifying parallels too easy to assert a positive content. In fact, the *propositio* and *dispositio* of the prologue, as well as many other transitions, sound quite scholastic.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in the framing dialogue there is no sign that Socrates' speech is free from the same charges he points out. If Socrates' speech had a positive content, the framing dialogue would seem out of place. A moral use of history might fit the ancient past, but some direct references to the present prevent such reading.

To overcome this dichotomy, it is necessary to understand *Menexenus*' ambiguous character. The odd effect that it causes is due to the way it is constructed. If one reads *Menexenus* as a whole, it is difficult that not even a shadow of doubt arises about the presence of irony. However, taken out of its context, the funeral oration seems to be a brilliant piece of oratory. The speech is designed to look like a true one, and, therefore, it is hard to trace evident exaggerations, accumulations, amplifications or semantic

47 Clavaud (1980: p. 64).

48 See Kennedy (1963: p. 160) and Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 84).

49 See Wendland (1890: p. 183), Méridier (1964: p. 66), Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 85).

reversals, which are typical mechanisms of parody. An overall evaluation must take in account that the speech is both independent from and subject to the framing dialogue.

### 3. A school manifesto

It remains now to consider background and purpose of Plato's *Menexenus*. The thematic coherence with *Gorgias* leads to consider not so much rhetoric in itself, but rather the educational value of rhetoric as core discussion of this dialogue. In fact, it seems to illustrate certain practices of schoolteachers and may be understood as a mockery of Isocrates' conception of rhetoric as related to education and politics. The young age of Menexenus, his willingness to leave education for a career in politics, and his apparent disregard for further scientific studies refer, indeed, to the quarrel between Plato and Isocrates about the contents of a proper education.

Just like Callicles, who, according to Socrates, received a sound education (*Grg.* 487b πεπαιδευσαί τε γὰρ ἱκανῶς), Menexenus believes he has already accomplished his παιδευσίς and φιλοσοφία and, therefore, to be sufficiently versed in them (234a ὥς ἱκανῶς ἤδη ἔχων) to pursue a career in politics. In Callicles' opinion, the practice of philosophy deals with trifle things (486c τὰ μικρά, cf. 497b) and has no utility for practical life (485d-486d). Despite considering philosophy as suitable for a young man, given that it proves his liberal mind and may foreshadow a brilliant future, Callicles sees as risible the fact that an elderly man may still practice philosophy. Similarly, Callicles has the same feeling towards philosophers as towards those who lisp or *play childish games* (485b τοὺς ψελλιζομένους καὶ παίζοντας).

Callicles' position recalls to some extent Isocrates' educational programme, which the latter asserted in several works right after the foundation of his school. According to Isocrates, "to make likely conjectures about useful things is way better than having exact knowledge about the useless" (9,5). Young men, however, may well be forgiven for deepening such useless knowledge, since they are naturally inclined towards extraordinary and marvellous things (9,7). In *Helena* Isocrates states how hard it is, conversely, to compose speeches of general import and adequate form to fit any given situation, just as practicing seriousness is far more demanding than levity, i.e. *playing like a child* (9,11 τὸ σπουδάζειν τοῦ παιζειν ἐπιπονώτερόν ἐστιν). Moreover, *Panathenaicus* (21,26-29, cf. 10,23) contains statements even closer to Callicles' charges. Isocrates states that, even though elder people should find subjects like geometry, astronomy, and the so-called eristic intolerable, these may well please young men. At any rate, such disciplines prevent them from other harmful things and therefore can be regarded as useful and fitting occupations. However, those who practice them in their old age seem not only to fail to use this knowledge properly, but also to be less cultivated than their own pupils. Isocrates, instead, aims at discussing graver and nobler things, namely the affairs of Hellas, kings, and states (21,11). As early as in *Panegyricus* (11,1-14), Isocrates asserted his own way of teaching and composing: according to him, stylistic refinement of a speech must go hand in hand with the relevance of the subject, it must enhance speaker's skills, and be



useful for the audience, whose lives are improved by this kind of speeches (11,189). In fact, Isocrates aims at speaking about great and noble things, which address people's well-being and the common good (19,276).

In light of these statements, Socrates' contrived fear of being scoffed by Menexenus, once he would have seen an elder man *playing as a child* (236c ἀλλ' ἴσως μου καταγελάσει, ἂν σοι δόξω πρεσβύτης ὦν ἔτι παίζειν), may be better clarified. The verb παίζειν does not only refer to an alien behaviour of Socrates, or to an insignificant task without any value. It is Socrates' counterpoint towards Callicles' allegations, which partially recall Isocrates' conception of education. In *Menexenus* Socrates undertakes the task of demonstrating how easily a good funeral oration can be composed. Hence, he seems to assert that not so much the practice of scientific studies, but rather the composition of a brilliant speech is a childish task, for it does not require any particular skill, nor does it involve any risk of failure.

*Menexenus* witnesses a quarrel between opponent schools and diverging conceptions of education, and this is clarified by certain features of the framing dialogue. The schooling setting of *Menexenus*, its mimicry of school practices, and the presence of technical terminology related to the 4th century schooling debate have been often underestimated.

Socrates praises the eloquence of those rhetoricians who do not praise randomly (οὐκ εἰκῇ), because they have speeches prepared long beforehand (ἐκ πολλοῦ χρόνου λόγοι παρεσκευασμένοι), and embellish the speech with the most beautiful words (235a κάλλιστα πῶς τοῖς ὀνόμασι ποικίλλοντες), so that they bewitch (γοητεύουσιν) the soul of the bystanders. And so, even though compelled to improvise (235d αὐτοσχεδιάζειν), they do not encounter any difficulty, and not only because they have ready-made speeches: if a speaker contends before the very people whom he praises, Socrates states, it is no big deal to seem a fine speaker (οὐδὲν μέγα δοκεῖν εὖ λέγειν).

Alcidamas criticized the παρασκευή of ready-made speeches, a practice spread by schoolteachers like Isocrates (ἐν πολλῷ δὲ χρόνῳ γράψαι, fr. 1 A.). On the contrary, Isocrates aims at choosing the fitting elements for each subject, in order to arrange them properly and to *embellish* appropriately the whole speech, speaking therefore with flowing and melodious words (8,16 πρεπόντως ὅλον τὸν λόγον καταποικίλαι καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν εὐρύθμως καὶ μουσικῶς εἰπεῖν). In fact, Isocrates addresses just those who do not accept even a word spoken *randomly* (11,12 τοὺς οὐδὲν ἀποδεχομένους τῶν εἰκῇ λεγομένων) and criticizes speakers' habit of flattering their hearers by making excuses about their lack of preparation, the difficulty of improvising or finding words appropriate to the greatness of their theme (11,13).

Hence, Plato's *Menexenus* contains some technical words which refer to a current discussion on education and expresses no doubt about the fact that οἱ ῥήτορες δεξιοὶ εἰσιν (235c). It rather recognises and demonstrates the bewitching effect of speeches made by school masters, and therefore questions the educational value of their art.

Moreover, the short sketch of Socrates' apprenticeship under Aspasia contains seeds of a technical vocabulary. Socrates heard Aspasia recite a funeral speech in its entirety (236b περαινούσης ἐπιτάφιον λόγον); Aspasia listed (διῆει) the *topoi* that need to be improvised (τὰ μὲν ἐκ τοῦ παραχρήμα) and composed the epitaph having before her eyes some

pieces that she had already prepared (τὰ δὲ πρότερον ἔσκεμμένη), namely those she composed for Pericles; Aspasia glued together (συγκολλῶσα) the improvised parts with such residues and then forced Socrates to memorise them. It is very likely that the expression τὰ δὲ πρότερον, apart from being an allusion to Pericles' speech, refers to the *topoi* that a funeral oration always needs to contain. The verb σκέπτομαι recalls a preliminary phase of study, while συντίθημι indicates the composition and περαίνω the presentation. Moreover, συγγολλάω is linked with untruthful speeches already in Aristophanes (ψευδῶν συγκολλητής, *Nu.* 446; cf. *V.* 1041, *Th.* 54).<sup>50</sup>

Aspasia is praised for her excellence in rhetoric, for her exceptional pupil, and teaching method. The figure of Aspasia, as mistress of Pericles and inflexible διδάσκαλος ῥητορικῆς (236a) of Socrates, personifies above all the school rhetorician, the teacher of rhetoric. The caricatural traits of Aspasia mock certain school practices, such as the habit of learning speeches by heart: Socrates remembers perfectly Aspasia's speech also because, as he reveals to Menexenus, he risked to receive the blows of his teacher every time he forgot a passage (236c).

It must be borne in mind that the portrayal of Aspasia as an outstanding and unforgiving teacher of the most prominent Athenians is taken from Old Comedy, and this plays in favour of a parodic reading.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Aspasia derives her traits from the homonymous works of Aeschines and Antisthenes, and this is supported by the literary and schooling activity run by Aspasia in *Menexenus*.<sup>52</sup> Aspasia and Pericles are literary figures that carry an educational and, in this respect, political meaning. Aspasia writes brilliant speeches and seduces bystanders' mind. However, she offers nothing that pertains to παιδείσεις and φιλοσοφία. Aspasia is a teacher of rhetoric, and not a dialectician. Her charm and skill bewitch, instead of educating. Aspasia is a skilled speaker and therefore very dangerous.

50 For these references I am indebted with Labriola (2010). The value of περιλείμματα should not be overestimated with Nannini (2014: p. 253) and Pappas & Zelcer (2015: p. 106). Their value is not so much in the content, but rather in their nature of residues, artfully reused and glued together with parts improvised on the spot, so that they seem new and not prepared ἐκ πολλοῦ χρόνου.

51 Both the scholium (*schol.* Plat. *Mx.* 235e) and Plutarch (*Per.* 24) recall the names with which Old Comedy teased Aspasia: 'τύραννος of Pericles', 'new Omphale', 'Helena'. Cratinus even called her 'Hera' ἵσως ὅτι καὶ Περικλῆς Ὀλύμπιος προσηγορεύετο.

52 As for Aeschines' *Aspasia* (*SSR* VI/A 59-72), there is a general agreement in believing that it was centred on Aspasia's pedagogical activity. It dealt with the Socratic theme of ἔρως and that of βελτίον γίγνεσθαι, i.e. it focused on if and how the conjugal ἀρετή may be achieved. Aeschines praised the influence that Aspasia had on Pericles' eloquence and upheld the positive value of Gorgias' rhetorical style. Since Aeschines adopted Gorgias' style in his works (cf. *D. L.* II 60), his defence of Aspasia has been understood as an attempt to defend himself. As to Antisthenes' *Aspasia* (*SSR* V/A 142-144), there is too little evidence to trace structure and content of the dialogue. However, it is possible to infer an essentially negative evaluation of the sensual influence that Aspasia had on Pericles.

## Conclusion

Plato's *Menexenus* must be read in the light of a double competition: one involving the Academy and Isocrates' school for educational primacy and one between Plato and other Socratics within the Academy. Characters' meaning and polemical implications must be understood through Plato's constant controversy towards other interpretations of Socrates (Aeschines, Antisthenes) and Athenian schools. Aeschines offers a positive version of Aspasia, almost a female counterpart of Socrates, expert in διαλέγεσθαι and marital issues. Conversely, Antisthenes points out the dangers of Aspasia's eros by negatively judging the influence she exerted on Pericles. Plato's Aspasia conveys firstly the differing interpretations given by Aeschines and Antisthenes, and, secondly, a debate on teaching and eloquence.

In this respect, a central theme of *Menexenus* is the educational role of rhetoric. In fact, it replies to Callicles' allegations found in *Gorgias* against the educational value of philosophy as Plato saw it, namely a constant scientific research. After the theoretical criticism of rhetoric launched in *Gorgias*, it is likely that Plato considered appealing the attempt to demonstrate to speakers, namely politicians, how easily a funeral speech can be written, and indeed a good one.

The epitaph does not simply confirm and extend the charges made by Socrates in the opening dialogue. It shows how little effort is required for composing a brilliant literary product. The speech is neither more nor less than a good example of this genre. Plato has seriously played on one of the most patriotic genres at Athens, and the appearance of Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides' work may well have encouraged Plato to take this path.

A discussion about rhetoric could not be separated from that about the very politics which spread and fostered that kind of eloquence, and in fact *Menexenus'* *mise en scène* recalls some prominent figures of 5th century Athens. It is necessary, therefore, to keep in mind the topical character of this dialogue.

Tsitsiridis (1998: p. 81) denies the presence of satire because both recognisable distortions and clear criticism would be lacking, as well as the necessary unmasking and exposure on which the protreptic intention of a satire is based. However, it is very likely that all these impressions were evident to contemporary readers right after the peace of Antalcidas. A recognisable distortion of the events seems clear in the account of the years 404-386. Consequently, a clear criticism had to be recognizable due to the historical consequences of the peace, and not only due to Socrates' words in the framing dialogue. An unmasking of eulogies' mystifications becomes clearer, moreover, the more attention is paid to the original reworking of Pericles' praise of Athenian constitution. Plato made explicit the implicit traits of Pericles' message, and this can well be understood as exposure. A discrepancy between Athenian imaginary and reality may no longer be comprehensible to us, but it had to be evident to the ancient reader.

In this respect, the serious implications that parody can have may be better clarified. Exemplarity and parody, irony and seriousness should not be considered as mutually exclusive, for a protreptic tendency seems present, if we regard *Menexenus* as a school

manifesto. Plato did not entrust it with a positive content, but rather with a negative one. In other words, Plato wanted to remove any educational value from the political meaning of discourse as Isocrates intended it. By doing that, Plato affirmed the educational primacy of his school, not by proposing a positive content, but rather by belittling the political and educational conception of rhetoric professed by Isocrates.

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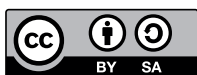
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# The Pursuit of Success in Academia: Plato's Ghost Asks "What then?"

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## Abstract

What do we pursue as we seek success in academia? For most, the path to academic success focuses narrowly on A-level journal publications, which has caused a stealthy but steady erosion in the very essence of academia. In this essay, we explore that erosion by drawing on the poem by William Butler Yeats titled "What then?" to highlight the questions, doubts, and perils that lie at each of the four stages of academic life: doctoral student, junior professor, senior professor, and professor emeritus. We then offer a new set of questions that academics may ask at each stage to remain true to their sense of scholarly identity and calling. Our hope is to shine a critical spotlight on the modal journey and inspire a confident and courageous few to deviate from that well-trodden path and chart a course that is truer to the essence, purpose, and potential of academia.

## Keywords

academic success, vocation, calling, Yeats, academic impact, research

The times have not been kind to academia. Numerous developments and nascent sentiments both outside and inside have conspired to cast a shadow over academia's legitimacy and utility, and the constant chipping away has rendered it vulnerable to disintegration as an institution in and of modern society. On the outside are the disturbing trends playing out in the current political, economic, and social contexts that discount the need for and the validity of factual knowledge and expertise, for example, the labeling of inconvenient truths and uncomfortable realities as "fake news," the delegitimizing of expertise by equating it to mere opinions, the decimation of evidence-based reasoning and analyses that are so critical for making thoughtful and objective-as-possible decisions, and the hyperpolarization of perspectives and worldviews that have made any kind of meaningful dialogue or debate fruitless, if not impossible. The net impact of these developments has been a sidelining of academia and the undermining of what it has to offer—a place where people in society can turn for answers to difficult questions that impact our life and the world around us, answers that carry credibility and a stamp of integrity for they are rooted in academia's mission to seek out new knowledge and disseminate ideas using evidence that is analyzed through the scientific method.

But more troubling are the corrosive forces at play inside academia itself. The current obsession with rankings on the part of the senior academic leadership, the constant pressure to reduce the length of programs to make them attractive to potential applicants, the unquestioned devotion to an ever-growing range of metrics to assess the performance of the school, and the career path and priorities for individual professors that focus narrowly on A-level academic publications

and are embraced uncritically as the "right" way to succeed (Hoffman, 2017) have all caused a stealthy but steady erosion in the very essence of academia. The worrisome aspect here is that these internal threats to the legitimacy of academia as an institution don't necessarily take the form of a direct, tangible attack. If that were the case, then it would in all likelihood prompt a rallying cry and a swift response from those who appreciate and cherish the true spirit of academia. But this internal assault on the very essence of academia is more of the slow and imperceptible kind that threatens to weaken and alter before the dangers posed by it are grasped. We are like the proverbial frog in boiling water, unable to detect that we are being consumed.

To wake us out of our perilous path, we need a reexamination of the basic questions, motivations, and responsibilities that come with being professors and set a new course to bring our work back in line with the true purpose of higher education (Lubchenco, 1998, 2017). Ultimately, we feel a need to restore to academia a sense of calling or vocation (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010), and a sense of the university as "a temple dedicated to knowledge and a human spirit of inquiry . . . a place where learning and scholarship are revered" and

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“students are not customers; they are acolytes. Teaching is not a job; it is a sacrament. Research is not an investment; it is a testament” (March, 2003, p. 356).

In this essay, we draw on a highly perceptive and penetrating poem by William Butler Yeats (1939/1968) titled “What then?” to highlight the questions, doubts, and perils that may nag us as we move along our academic journeys as university professors if we do not travel wisely. Our focus is on the individual professor and his or her career path. Our intent is to prompt a critical questioning of how we typically imagine, structure, and enact these career paths. Although the arguments outlined below flow from our own experiences and observations as business school professors, we see our observations as relevant to all disciplines while also recognizing that not every professor necessarily walks this path. We are inspired by those who have taken the road less traveled in pursuit of being true to their own scholarly selves. So, in this essay, we want to shine a critical spotlight on the modal journey with a hope that a confident and courageous few will buck the trend and chart a new path that is truer to the essence, purpose, and potential of academia.

### “What Then?” by W.B. Yeats

The poem by Yeats highlights the life journey of a young man shaped by a quest for achieving the tangible metrics of success typical in most societies. With determination, hard work, and smarts, the young man succeeds in checking box after box on the scorecard of his life but only to find that he can’t shake a vague emptiness that accompanies every stage of his journey. His sense of feeling unfulfilled and incomplete is troubling for he has done and accomplished exactly what the social norms and mores of his time and context prescribe as the essential elements of success. But somehow, they seem deficient as he arrives at the end. In essence, the poem is a siren call for authenticity and mindfulness in making sense of our ambitions and pursuits and to resist the gradual slide into a narrowly construed career path driven by the quest for affirmation and status, even if it is a well-trodden and overwhelmingly prescribed one.

We see a message in Yeats’ poem that applies to the academic quest for success that is all too prevalent in our world; one that has become fixated on the quantitative measures of output rather than any kind of qualitative sense of having contributed valuable knowledge to society. All too often, our academic worth is measured by our number of A-level publications, h-index, citation counts, and the like. And, as a result, the attainment of these measures become the actual quest of the academic scholar, not the knowledge they are meant to represent. As we check box after box on the scorecard of our academic lives, the question that Plato’s ghost asks becomes all the more urgent, “what next?” In the remainder of this essay, we structure our observations around the four stanzas of Yeats’ poem and connect them to the four

stages of the academic life: doctoral student, junior professor, senior professor, and professor emeritus.

### Doctoral Student and the Quest for Acceptance

His chosen comrades thought at school  
He must grow a famous man;  
He thought the same and lived by rule,  
All his twenties crammed with toil;  
“What then?” sang Plato’s ghost. “What then?”

The life of a doctoral student is one of great excitement and great fear. We are excited to begin our pursuit of knowledge as a lifelong career. We fear that we will not measure up to the expectations of the world we are entering. We take our courses, write our papers, pass our preliminary examination, defend our dissertation, and accept our first academic post. Through it all, we become increasingly aware of how we compare to our peers. Have we mastered the literature? Have we submitted our first paper? Has that paper been accepted? Have we clarified a solid dissertation topic? Is it a topic that “the market” will value enough to give me a job? Each of these questions nags at us as we are trained and molded—and sometimes asked to leave the field.

Through it all, we have observed that the spirit of doctoral education seems to have drifted from questions over *who* we are as scholars and *why* we want to pursue this kind of life to one of *what* we intend to study and *how* we intend to gain the acceptance of our field. It is a shift in emphasis away from reflection and fostering the spirit of inquiry for a lifelong vocation and toward action and learning the tools and techniques for “successful publication” for gaining a job. The creative art of inquiry is being replaced by the tactical science of attaining the metrics of academic progress. As such, doctoral training becomes a pursuit of publishable research rather than interesting research. Those who do not master the attainment of “hits” and A-level “pubs” will likely be expelled from the field, informed that they do not measure up to the standards of academic inquiry. And if we are fortunate enough to measure up, Plato’s ghost asks “what then?” Has our spirit of deep learning and open inquiry remained intact?

### Junior Professor and the Quest for Accolades

Everything he wrote was read,  
After certain years he won  
Sufficient money for his need,  
Friends that have been friends indeed;  
“What then?” sang Plato’s ghost. “What then?”

The life of a junior faculty member is often distilled down to one solitary quest—to do whatever it takes to get tenure.

Frustratingly, the exact path to that goal is often murky and opaque. Mentors and senior colleagues on the third-year review committee may offer some guidance, which is usually in the form of “you need XX more A-publications” though the number XX is always unclear. Our success and therefore our sense of self-worth becomes defined by this narrow metric, one that is really about quantity and not quality. Or rather, the quality is measured simply by the journal in which our work is published, not what it says.

But this singular pursuit of A-level publications can become an obsession, one that all-too-often diminishes the quality of our work, both for ourselves and for society. It pushes us toward the strategic pursuit of small nuggets of publishable research, ideally as many as possible by breaking our work into its “minimum publishable unit” to maximize our paper output. Another strategy is to publish in groups, dividing our work, so that the same amount of effort can yield the maximum paper output, but in the process, clouding our individual contribution and ideas. These strategies lead to specialization and incremental contributions to theory, driving us to become a field of “brick-makers” (Forscher, 1963; Hoffman, 2015), where we become fixated on generating lots of small pieces of knowledge—bricks—but become far less concerned with putting them together into a cohesive whole that could fully explain the corpus of our inquiry.

Fed by what some have called our “theory fetish” (Hambrick, 2007), where practical relevance is overshadowed by theoretical rigor, we shun the interesting, complex, long-term, “big” question-focused inquiries as they become too risky to pursue. Books are out of the question. Our hopes, anxieties, and actions in this stage play out within the confines of the long shadow cast by the looming tenure decision. It is far more “rational” to focus on well-bounded, bite-sized research projects that fall within the streams recognized by A-level journals and will yield citations in time for a tenure review committee to evaluate.

The years leading up to the tenure decision are often nerve-racking for those of us who are unsure if we have the sufficient number of A-level publications to be granted tenure. More often than not, the notions of success and career progress in our academic environments—the overwhelming stress from the “publish or perish” ethos—push us to distort, if not abandon, the kind of scholar we want to be and force us to fit into a predetermined mold.

If the tenure decision turns out to be negative, it invariably lands as a crushing body blow, a devastating rejection of both our job security as well as an attack on our self-image after having invested everything to be a kind of scholar that we thought would satisfy the letter writers, tenure committees, and faculty votes. But, in that pursuit, we may have emerged as something quite removed from our authentic self. In that case, losing our job can also mean that we have lost ourselves in the process.

And what happens if we play the game well? Have we stayed true to the kind of scholar we were meant to be? Well, all too often, succeeding at tenure means speaking to smaller and narrower academic audiences that form our disciplinary community. This increasing insularity often “registers not the needs of truth but academic-empire building” (Jacoby, 2000). The notion of speaking to broader audiences (such as the general public) becomes coded as a distraction from our “real” work of producing academic publications, or worse an anti-intellectual waste of time (Hoffman, 2016). At its extreme, we find ourselves using a language that these broader audiences do not understand, publishing in journals they don’t read, and asking questions for which they have little concern. Whether this work actually creates real-world change is a question that is rarely, if ever, asked. Yet, this is the question that motivates our teaching, which becomes a casualty of this obsessive quest for the next A-level publication and the status that comes with it. So, as we advance through the stage of junior faculty member, Plato’s ghost asks “what then?” Do we risk becoming intelligent and successful but narrow specialists rather than open, curious scholars and intellectuals?

### *Senior Professor and the Quest for Status*

All his happier dreams came true—  
A small old house, wife, daughter, son,  
Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,  
poets and Wits about him drew;  
“What then.?” sang Plato’s ghost. “What then?”

The life of a senior faculty member becomes, all too often, one of continuity and not change. We have succeeded by the metrics of the academy, and therefore we continue to pursue and perpetuate those same metrics. Although tenure, and certainly the reward of full professor, is justified on the grounds of freeing the scholar to pursue unorthodox or potentially provocative research, most senior professors continue to pursue the types of A-level publications that got them to this stage of their career in the first place. We continue to add “research bricks” to our already impressive list of publications. We have been trained in this task, we have perfected our craft, and we have been given the accolades for doing it well, earning the esteem of our disciplinary peers and associations in the process. Why would we choose to do anything else? To deviate and construct new structures, areas, themes, topics, or questions would be a risky endeavor, one for which we may lose that cherished esteem.

As such, we become complacent. We enjoy the luxury of having mastered the skill of successfully “playing the game,” so there is not much appetite for breaking from what we know and relearning new and better ways of knowing and doing. We have no incentive to question or change our prior

practice and even less to take some ownership to question or change the institutions of our field. Why would we challenge the metrics of success by which we were deemed worthy of the elevated status that we now enjoy? Do we have any obligation to junior scholars to do so? To do so would question our own merits as “successful scholars” and would be a costly expense of time and effort that may distract us from the continued pursuit of that success. So, we continue on our path or rest on our laurels under the mistaken belief that we have “arrived.” And in the process, Plato’s ghost asks “what then?” Have we abandoned the task of creating general knowledge and improving the institutions in which we have succeeded and others must follow, preferring instead to maintain the status quo and our own ego satisfaction in the process?

### *Professor Emeriti and the Quest for Validation*

The work is done,” grown old he thought,  
 “According to my boyish plan;  
 Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,  
 Something to perfection brought”;  
 But louder sang that ghost, “What then?”

Neither of us are emeriti faculty yet; though we are closer to that final identity than we are to the start. What we write about here is based on our observations of colleagues who have become emeritus professors and our expectations of what we can begin to see. For many, though not all, the life of an emeritus faculty member is a confused and conflicted time. The emphasis is one of retroactive sensemaking of our contributions. That self-examination may include questions over the quality of our work and the communities to which it was directed. Some of us hold firm to the metrics that conferred the status we enjoyed, but at times growing dissatisfied that our standing atrophies so quickly. The adage, “you are only as relevant as your last publication” may become painfully clear. It is not uncommon at this stage to feel forgotten by, and even angry at, the same communities that once feted us for it seems like a lifetime of work has been either reduced to a few summary contributions or quietly ignored as no one seems able to see the coherent message we believe is in it. More often than not, the feeling of loss in no longer being center stage is accompanied by a very critical view of the stage itself. All too often, we commiserate with other professor emeriti about the slipping standards in educational programs, the diluting of rigor in research, the pandering to donors and funding sources, and rudderless leadership of the schools we once worked at. And it may be that in this phase, Plato’s question finally hits its mark. Will the measures and metrics of success that lead us through our careers give us a sense of meaning and purpose? What do those citations counts and awards really mean? How long before our work is

no longer cited and the drum rolls stop? Or will we continue to look for more? How do we measure our real impact? Was it a work-life meaningfully lived?

### **Answering Plato’s Ghost**

In the end, Plato’s Ghost is asking us if academia has lost its way. The institution is facing a crisis of relevance, and are we feeding that crisis by pursuing our own measures and metrics of academic success rather than the intellectual pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of society? Certainly, the voices of external critics are growing louder. College degrees are becoming too expensive, the academic disciplines in which those degrees are conferred are becoming too narrow and specialized, the people who populate those disciplines are becoming further removed from empirical reality, and external critics are asking questions about the value we provide to society.

The developments over the last few years have only added urgency to the need to engage in sober reflection and a reimagining of the role that academia can and should play. The political, economic, social, and cultural storm clouds darkening our skies today threaten to weaken the institutions that form the bedrock of our society, corrode our conduct, coarsen our discourse, dull our collective intellect, stunt our feelings, and cheapen our actions. Academia needs to serve as the intellectual conscience in (and for) such an increasingly confusing and conflicted world. Rather than retreat and batten down the hatches against the gathering storm clouds to isolate and insulate our academic enterprise, the situation calls on us to unflinchingly see, understand, and celebrate our connectivity to the context in which we are embedded and to embrace the responsibility of nurturing it.

Our interpretation of academic scholars as stewards of societal well-being is a point of departure from March’s (2003) protestation that “a university . . . is a place where learning and scholarship are revered, *not primarily for what they contribute to personal or social wellbeing* but for the vision of humanity that they symbolize, sustain, and pass on” (p. 356; italics added for emphasis). We draw our inspiration from John Donne’s (1624/1923) thoughtful essay *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* in which he noted, “No man is an island, entire of itself” (*Meditation XVII*). In that vein, academia is not an island untouched by the challenges, perils, and opportunities that color the broader world in which we live and disconnected from its demands, pleas, and priorities. It ought not to be seen solely as a temple with hallowed, exclusive traditions, and an exalted quest for “truth” that is best admired from afar and revered from within as March (2003) seemed to suggest. Rather than seek sanctuary in the quiet and safe confines of a temple, it is imperative that academics step out into the tempest of daily life and help society tackle its pressing issues with intellectual gravitas, curiosity, and rigor. The vision of humanity that academia symbolizes and sustains (March, 2003) needs to be paired with a vigorous engagement in bettering that vision (Lubchenco, 2017).

So, with the role of the academic scholar in society in such flux, how must we respond and change if we are to reverse the trajectory of this growing problem. To what have we devoted our life's work? How do we measure impact? Is that the right measure? What might be a better measure? Each of us will have to answer that for ourselves and for our institutions. But if we continue to do what we have been doing and enact our current notions of successful careers as measured by quantitative metrics, then we run two risks. At a personal level, we may end up trying to validate our contributions retroactively beyond the tangible check marks in the boxes such as citation counts and accolades. The danger is that work designed for one type or measure of impact cannot be expected to meet another measure, except by accident. A paper designed as a theoretical brick for an A-level academic journal may not translate easily into a nugget of meaningful knowledge that informs our world. As such, our efforts to retroactively show our worth and value will likely fail. At an institution level, we may find that the overall enterprise of academic research is becoming increasingly irrelevant as what we write about and what we value and reward is removed from the real challenges and issues facing society. Our works could potentially end up being designed and developed solely by and for academics with no real utility, impact, or purpose. Society will then be justified in accusing us of self-indulgence and pretentious intellectualism and relegating us to the dust heap of impractical, fanciful thinking.

A good place to start to remedy this situation is to take a hard, critical look at our own career paths and what we consider as the sacred rites of passage. As Joseph Campbell said, "There is perhaps nothing worse than reaching the top of the ladder and discovering that you're on the wrong wall." Perhaps, we should pause once in a while to check if our ladders are against the right wall lest we get to the top of the wall only to hear Plato's ghost say "what then?" And to that end, we may look to the next generation of scholars as motivation or encouragement for change. There appears to be a demographic shift in play, where young scholars are seeking more real-world impact from their work than more senior colleagues, challenging the academy to examine new efforts at "the necessity and possibility of moving from interpretation to engagement, from theory to practice, from the academy to its publics" (Burawoy, 2005a, 2005b). They will be aided in this effort by the cataclysmic shift that social media is creating for both the nature of science and scientific discourse within society and the ways in which future academics will perform their tasks of research and teaching (Brossard, 2013). But will academia spit them out, as it has done in the past? Or, will they come in such numbers and at a time of such external pressure for change that they will change academia? To do the latter, they will need the help of senior scholars who hold the power and ability to shift the levers of our institutions.

In shifting those levers, we may begin by clarifying the questions we should be asking at the various stages of our

academic journey. What are the broad perspectives that we need to embrace at these different stages to access our full potential?

As *doctoral students*, we need to ask foundational questions over what kind of academic scholar we want to be and what kinds of issues we wish to devote our lives to addressing. The key questions here ought to be "who am I as a person and an emerging scholar?" "why am I pursuing this path?" "what kind of contribution do I want to make in my limited academic life?" and "what kind of metrics do I see as relevant for measuring that contribution?" This must be a process of deep discernment as the choice of a dissertation topic is highly consequential, setting the course that will guide much of the rest of our career. Only with a sense of personal vocation can we undertake this self-examination in a way that taps into our deepest sense of who we are and what we have to offer.

As *junior faculty members*, we need to wrestle with the tensions of satisfying the metrics by which we will be judged and the personal direction we set out as doctoral students. The key questions here ought to be "how do I remain true to myself while also satisfying the gate-keepers of the institution?" "is that even possible or desirable?" and "should I stay true to the metrics of success I laid out as a doctoral student or do they need adjustment?" Academia is very much an apprentice system, one guided by strict measures of rigor and quality of scholarship. But if the pursuit of those metrics—which can differ widely between one institution and another—distorts who we are and what our vocation is meant to be, then we have to consider shifting institutions or even leaving academia altogether, finding a more conducive environment in a think tank, nonprofit, consulting firm, government agency, or the private sector. With an open mind to these possibilities, we can disarm the terrifying grip that the ultimate tenure decision can hold over us, allowing us a powerful ambivalence to the evaluation of the tenure review process.

As *senior faculty*, we have a responsibility to act with courage in terms of the kinds of research questions we pose, the projects we undertake, the audiences we seek to reach, and the kind of work culture and school policies we create or shape. As the primary decision makers in the schools at which we work, we have the obligation to craft, articulate, and role-model an ethos that celebrates an enlightened approach to research and teaching. The key questions here ought to be "how do I design systems and structures to keep alive the true spirit of inquiry in this school along with a passionate commitment to educating our students?" "how do I build a community of scholars where a diverse array of approaches to seeking and disseminating knowledge are included?" "what are the big, relevant questions in my field that I ought to be directing my research energies toward regardless of the odds of publication success" and "how might I serve as a bridge between the academic world and the worlds of practice so that both communities flourish through a mutually beneficial exchange?"



As *professor emeriti*, the onus is on us to embrace our roles as elders of the community and offer wise counsel for the development of our fields, schools and next generation of scholars. By this stage of our academic lives, a lifetime of experience would have imbued us with invaluable hindsight and a 30,000-foot view of academia that is critical for taking stock. The key questions here ought to be “how can I best ensure that the lessons from the triumphs and errors of our generation are passed on to the next generation?” and “how can I help the next generation of academics and business school leaders progress further than our generation ever did?” The focus ought not to be on adding yet another coat of polish to our already shiny reputations, but on withdrawing graciously from the center stage while welcoming the next generation to occupy that space and standing by to support them for even greater success.

Each of these stages is critical for attaining the real measures of success that guide one through a vocation or calling. In the end, a meaningful academic life will be measured in the ways we have impacted how people think and not on citation counts and top-tier journal articles. This is the true notion of the academy as a special and honored place in society (March, 2003), not above it or separate from it, but part of it, offering our knowledge and our talents to the benefit of society (Lubchenco, 1998, 2017). Those of us who are privileged enough to live the life of an academic possess a privileged opportunity to contribute to the world around us. Or as John F. Kennedy said, “To those whom much is given, much is expected.” And, perhaps, if we were to live our academic lives in ways that are true enough and bold enough to deliver on those expectations, then maybe Plato’s ghost would stop singing “what then?”

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# The Play of Conspiracy and Democratic Erosion in Plato's *Republic*

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**Abstract:** *Does the Republic depict a conspiracy? The ostensible impetus for discussing profound political change behind closed doors is a desire to discuss the meaning of justice, not to replace a political order with a new one. But the dialogue takes place during the Peloponnesian War, when fears of plots sporadically consumed an eroding Athenian democracy. Arguments about political instability and instances of plotting reverberate throughout dialogue that takes shape in this suspicious climate. Whether Socrates makes us privy to a conversation about a political world that does not exist or presents us with a strategy for talking about revolution undetected remains unresolved. I argue that Athenian fears of secret power and revolution express themselves in the style and arguments of the Republic and suggest that already at the origins of democratic practice, critics like Plato were concerned with theorizing the subtleties of democratic erosion.*

In the *Republic*, Socrates painstakingly recounts how he stayed up all night with other men designing a regime radically different from the democracy in which they live. The apparent impetus for discussing profound political change from the privacy of a home is a desire to explore the meaning of justice, not to replace a real political order with a new one (*Rep.* 369b).<sup>1</sup> But critics have long noted that Plato's staging casts a specter of plotting over the dialogue nonetheless. The private, secluded, and nocturnal setting infuses the group's activity with a "quasi-illicit" quality, gives the meeting "the look of conspiracy," and evokes circumstances that Plato's fourth-century BCE readers would have recognized as the initiation of a potential "coup" (Ober 1998, 221; Ferrari 2000, xii; Zuckert 2009, 429–30; see Strauss 1978 [1964]).

That Plato sets the *Republic* in a conspiratorial atmosphere is widely acknowledged, but what the actual significance of this framing is for the meaning of

the text remains unexplored. How might the illicitness impact the *Republic's* core arguments? Do the problems the *Republic* is grappling with change if we engage the dialogue through its seemingly conspiratorial frame? In exploring these questions, I develop a reading of the *Republic* that foregrounds the sense of conspiratorial possibility subtending the dialogue. I connect the conspiratorial atmosphere to the instances of collective plotting and conspiratorial thinking that emerge from it and argue that these rhetorical and doctrinal elements work together to produce the *Republic's* "play of conspiracy."

With "the play of conspiracy," I mean to establish an interpretive frame for capturing the performative, allusive, and dynamic senses in which a *topos* of conspiracy operates in Plato's text, none of which are unserious or trifling.<sup>2</sup> First, "performative" refers to the *Republic's* staging and dramatic action, which enact a potential conspiracy the way a play might. Insofar as this enact-

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<sup>1</sup>Translations of Plato's *Republic* are by Griffith (Plato 2000) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>The term "play" has been used in different ways to describe Plato's writing by other readers including Voegelin ([1957] 2000) and Blondell (2002).

<sup>3</sup>Roisman's argument (2006, 66) that Athenian anxieties about conspiracy dominated public discourse and reflected a suspicious world view focuses on the fourth century BCE in which Plato wrote, but he argues that Aristophanes' earlier comedies also express "the rhetoric of political conspiracy" in fifth-century Athens. This is good reason to consider that throughout the classical period, a *topos* of political conspiracy is available for strategic redeployment.



ment fails to establish a conspiracy with any certainty, however, I argue that the *Republic* is only ever “alluding” (*ad* “toward” + *ludere* “to play”) to an illicit activity. Second, this “allusiveness,” or playing at a conspiracy, invites us to hold open, rather than reconcile, two different interpretations of the dialogue’s impetus the whole time we read. Finally, instead of my suggesting that it is either rhetorical features, such as staging, or doctrinal concerns, such as the dialogue’s conspiratorial proposals, establishing the *topos* of conspiracy, I read the *Republic* through the “dynamic” interplay of its rhetorical and doctrinal registers. Foregrounding this dynamism enables me to treat the conspiratorial proposals of the dialogue as emanations of the distrustful and eroding democratic realities in which they are imagined and voiced.<sup>3</sup>

This argument—that analyzing the *Republic*’s play of conspiracy holds the key to unlocking its instructive insights into plotting and democratic decay—is due in no small part to the fact that Plato pulls his fourth-century audience back into the recent Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), a time of increasing polarization, waning confidence in democratic institutions, and mounting public concern over real and perceived plots against democracy (Carugati 2019; Roisman 2006, 68).<sup>4</sup> A conversation that recommends the routinization of collective deception by the ruling class in order to keep the regime just and stable over time takes shape, in other words, against an Athenian backdrop in which plotting and instability had become everyday political concerns. Socrates finds that the best deterrence against the dissent, faction, and instability that enable conspiracies by revolutionaries is a series of conspiratorial acts performed by wise and just rulers. Yet he finally admits that none of these efforts could, in practice, eliminate the possibility for change and regime breakdown.<sup>5</sup> Even the *kallipolis*, a regime expressly designed to achieve stability at all costs, would begin to succumb to corruption as soon as the rigged marriage “lottery” was improperly administered by the guardian class (546a). Restored to the convulsive political realities of their Athenian setting, these arguments for arresting change and preventing *stasis* through plotting no longer simply reflect the peculiar needs of the ideal city. They double as creative and immanently Athenian responses to a suspicious democratic world that had “never before”

the recent past experienced “such peril” from the inside.<sup>6</sup> Seen through this interplay of form and content, the dialogue’s core arguments take on new meaning: they offer a still-relevant cautionary tale about the fantasy, particularly alluring in unstable and conspiratorial times, of designing a constitution to stop change and dissent once and for all.

Here a few words about how I understand conspiracy may be in order. My working and flexible definition is inspired by everyday political usage to refer to a secret collaboration whose participants share an agenda to acquire or maintain political power. This means that “conspiracy” does not carry an exclusively insurgent or illicit valence, though this is certainly the sense invoked by the performative features of the *Republic*, as readers have noted. “Conspiracy” also functions polemically in political speech to refer to the covert activity a government may undertake to resist social change and conserve power purportedly in the name of justice and stability.<sup>7</sup> I propose that we think of the plotting that the *Republic* characters recommend for the just city in this light. The interpretive choice to call these activities “conspiratorial” rather than merely secretive or deceptive has the benefit of capturing, rather than obscuring, the collective dimension that Plato gives the guardians’ machinations. For while a conspiracy may require secrecy to achieve its ends, it is not the same as a secret or a deception as such. Neither a secret nor a lie has to be shared.

This brings me to the final sense of conspiracy I see at work in the *Republic*. So long as a conspiracy must remain hidden to accomplish the aims of its practitioners, its signs may, in practice, appear indeterminate to those on its outside. The secret clubs of elite men who gathered in private houses like the one in the *Republic* were organizations for political networking within Athenian democracy, as I elaborate below. But they also, from time to time, coordinated to overthrow democracy in Athens. For this reason, their gatherings could, especially in times of crisis, provoke rumors and accusations of plotting even in the absence of additional or certain proof. A convincing narration of a conspiracy in real time would therefore need to convey this indeterminacy while provoking a desire in the reader to decipher it. To say that the *Republic* invites us to confront the ambiguity of a real-time conspiracy, however, is not to call Plato a

<sup>4</sup>I discuss the complications of historically situating the dialogue in the next section.

<sup>5</sup>The routinization of deception includes the invention of the noble lie, a deliberate conspiracy in its first undertaking by founders and even possibly in its subsequent telling by rulers, as well as a range of mechanisms, like the rigged marriage “lottery,” which all aim at keeping the city’s membership order stable.

<sup>6</sup>Shear (2011, 2) is referring here to the decade following the first coup in 411, a span of time to which Plato’s setting incorporates allusions.

<sup>7</sup>A modern example of covert governmental activity in the United States is COINTELPRO, which aimed at neutralizing political groups like the Black Panther Party.

conspiracy theorist or claim that his text produces meaning conspiratorially. I do not advance a version of Leo Strauss's (1941) argument that Plato's writing style hides his (or Socrates') true ideas between the lines, whether to avoid "persecution" and reach the very few able to decode his hints. Rather, the performative reading developed here suggests that the *Republic* enacts the indeterminacy of a yet-to-be-proven conspiracy in plain sight. To take seriously the *Republic*'s illicit staging, then, is to see that it is impossible to settle once and for all whether Socrates is relaying an innocent conversation about a political world that could not exist or presenting a strategy for talking undetected about a practicable revolutionary conspiracy. The claim that he joined with other men to find "an example of a good city in speech" might just as easily sound like an alibi—the group stayed up all night for the sake of (the) argument, nothing more (427d-e).

The stakes of this reading for the history of political thought and for the study of political decay are not insignificant. Modern readers are accustomed to downplaying the suspiciousness pervading the registers of the *Republic*, but there is little reason to presume Plato's initial audience would have. Plato wrote the *Republic* (ca. 375 BCE) in a period of new democratic stability following Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, its five constitutional transitions, and its descent into civil war. He and his readers were deeply familiar with the polarization, mistrust, plotting, and periodically open violence that had characterized Athenian democracy just a few decades earlier. Socrates was tried and executed as part of this political context. Yet many Athenians at the time of the *Republic*'s dissemination seem to have hoped that the postwar redesign of the democracy's constitution, which granted law and legislation a central role in mediating conflict, had successfully resolved the deep conflicts of the past (Carawan 2013; Carugati 2019). The *Republic* suggests otherwise. Plato returns his readers to the problems of the recent past precisely because they point to the potential problems of the future. Erosion, and the plotting that often attends it, may not be uniquely democratic problems from the *Republic*'s vantage point. But if the endemic underlying condition of every "real" polis is conflict, as the dialogue suggests, then Athenian confidence in the postwar solution to *stasis* was dangerously impairing. For like any real-world regime, Athenian democracy still harbored the conditions of its own degeneration.

The article proceeds by exploring the Athenian dynamics of democratic erosion in the period of the *Republic*'s setting. I suggest that conspiracies, both real and perceived, were generated by and generative of an erosion of public confidence that made coups in Athens viable. Subsequent sections adopt this sense of the *Republic*'s con-

text as a lens for reconsidering aspects of its rhetorical dimensions and arguments. I show how these features of the text can be read as vehicles for analyzing democratic dynamics of instability and attempts at influencing Plato's fourth-century audience. I conclude by suggesting that if an imperiled, plot-ridden, and uncertain democratic context is not "mere" background to the so-called founding text of political theory but the catalyst for its arguments, a conspiratorial reading of the *Republic* has the power to unsettle the familiar terms in which political scientists typically approach the question of political decay today.

## The Democratic Erosion of the *Republic*'s Political Realities

Readers often take the illicit atmosphere of the *Republic* as a nod to Socrates' guilt by association with figures who suspended democracy at the end of the Peloponnesian War, right after the dialogue is set.<sup>8</sup> There are good reasons to think the staging is alluding to this (suspected) complicity. The junta of the Thirty, imposed by Sparta, would soon entangle many of the historical figures Plato puts in the *Republic*.<sup>9</sup> Socrates' reputation suffered from his private exchanges with oligarchs and oligarchic sympathizers, who exposed him to accusations of forbidden political activity conventionally associated with plotting. "By 399 BCE," the year of Socrates' trial and execution, "it was well known that some of the young men who hung around Socrates during the war years subsequently went on to commit crimes against other citizens, and against the polis order itself" (Ober 2017, 85).

Plato's initial fourth-century readers would know this recent history. They would also recognize that the figures Plato chooses to include in the dialogue were

<sup>8</sup>Howland (2004) treats the *Republic* as an engagement with this tyrannical violence. He reads the emphasis on Polemarchus' character as a "Platonic reply" to *Against Eratosthenes*, a speech, written and delivered by Lysias, that "calls for revenge against the murderers of his brother Polemarchus." He stresses dramatic irony, writing that "Plato's Athenian readers were doubtless well aware of these facts and of the oligarchy's execution of Niceratus and possibly also of Cleitophon," who are also present in Socrates' account of the evening (180, 181).

<sup>9</sup>Athenians tried and executed Socrates, unofficially at least, in particular for his ties to Critias, Plato's relative, a leader of the Thirty, and one of Socrates' students. According to G.R.F. Ferrari, "Plato is certainly at pains to lay the shadow of the Thirty and its bloody failure over the *Republic*'s opening pages most obviously by staging the discussion at the house of Cephalus. Both sons of this wealthy metic were to suffer under the Thirty, with Polemarchus murdered for his money and Lysias escaping into exile" (2000, 11).

a mix of soon-to-be-suspected conspirators, oligarchic sympathizers, and prodemocrats—people who ended up on opposing sides of the *stasis* that divided Athens in 404/403.<sup>10</sup> This use of characterization seems to distance the scene in the *Republic* from a specific oligarchic conspiracy. But that distancing hardly exhausts the range of meanings generated by the performative dimensions of the play of conspiracy. For, the staging enacts a suspicious democratic world in which the Athenian characters not only hatch plots but also think in terms of them. Thus, the common view that the illicit staging functions as a foreshadowing device to the Thirty, however plausible, draws our attention away from the dramatic setting to a real political event outside the text and its timespan. In this section, I want to focus attention back on the complex world of the *Republic*'s dramatic setting. I show how Plato depicts a conversation about revolutionary change against the eroding and highly uncertain democratic world of the Peloponnesian War (431–404) that precedes that junta, a period during which Athenians became increasingly suspicious of antidemocratic plots. What if the *Republic* is showing us something about these fluctuating political dynamics instead?

The *Republic* is Socrates' first-person narrative of what he did the previous night. He sets the time and space for that night, however, by alluding to historical persons, places, and events spanning different years during the war as if they were contemporaneous with each other. Commentary has traditionally concluded that the dialogue's internal evidence points to two plausible dramatic dates for the action, 411/410 and the earlier 422/421, with scholars divided between the two. According to Debra Nails (1998, 383), however, choosing between the two dates is ultimately problematic because the text's historical figurations allude to both of them and therefore to the last two decades of the war.<sup>11</sup> Rather than fixing the dramatic action to a specific year, then, Plato's allusions establish what we might call the *zeitgeist* of wartime Athens as the dialogue's "time." However gen-

eral this might seem at first glance, Athenian accounts of the period reveal that those years were characterized by specific dynamics of fear and waning public trust in democratic institutions. Recovering what this uncertainty and intermittent crisis was like is key to opening up the play of conspiracy and its immanent criticisms of democratic change.

Various texts from the fifth and fourth century open a window onto the patterns and constitutive characteristics of antidemocratic political collaboration that emerged during the *Republic*'s dramatic setting. Thucydides not only reports on but provides distinctive political insights into the turmoil that progressively pervaded Athenian life during the war. These insights emerge most clearly in his account of the years between 415 and 411, "a gloomy, violence-torn, and pessimistic time" that commentators have often used as a context for interpreting the *Republic*'s "general preoccupation with destruction and corruption" (Nails 1998, 385).<sup>12</sup>

Although Athenians worried about "political conspiracies" throughout the war, their fears "must have been heightened" (Roisman 2006, 69) around 415, after the failed expedition to Sicily, which "plunged Athens into a severe financial crisis, triggering instability" that would last at least a decade (Carugati 2019, 37).<sup>13</sup> Two events took on particular political significance around the time of the expedition: the mutilation of the Herms, sacred stone images that populated public spaces in Athens, and the circulation of rumors that some, including Alcibiades, had parodied the Eleusinian mysteries in private homes (Thuc. 6.27.1–29.3, 53.1–2, 60.1–61.7; Andoc. I.11–70). Many Athenians took the transgressions as signs of antidemocratic sentiment and perhaps the existence of an oligarchic conspiracy (*synōmosia*), and a general culture of suspiciousness overtook the city (Thuc. 6.53.3). The demos responded by appointing a commission of inquiry to investigate the events and offered rewards to citizens and noncitizens who could identify perpetrators (Thuc. 6.53, 6.60).<sup>14</sup> But "instead of testing the informers," the Athenians "in their suspicious temper welcomed all indifferently, arresting and imprisoning the best citizens upon the evidence of rascals" (Thucydides 1996, 6.53.2; Andoc. I.27). Once

<sup>10</sup>For an in-depth discussion of the figures in the house and their participation in the tyrannical coup, see Howland (2018) and Nails (2002).

<sup>11</sup>Nails (1998, 385) argues that the *Republic*'s folded time is an unintended consequence of Plato's writing practice. More fruitfully, Moors (1988, 6) considers it a rhetorical strategy that calls attention to the *Republic*'s difference from history: "Stated simply, this dialogue, as Plato writes it, cannot have actually taken place." Strauss ([1964] 1978, 62) finds this cloudy yet recognizable picture of a wartime Athens overwhelmed by political instability worth considering in its own right. Yet he ultimately retreats from this view. His interpretation of the political conditions in terms of immanent decline collapses the difference in perspective between a fifth-century character and a fourth-century reader.

<sup>12</sup>Readings of the *Republic* in this light include Campbell (1894); Shorey (1930); Jowett (1953); Voegelin ([1957] 2000); and Bloom (1968).

<sup>13</sup>Athenian preoccupations with plotting drew Aristophanes' attention a decade earlier in the *Knights* and *Wasps*. Thucydides' account of the first half of the war supports this picture as well.

<sup>14</sup>The use of paid informants in classical Greece aimed at foiling plots against a regime and deterring people "from initiating conspiracies in the first place" (Simonton 2017, 139).

exposure and accusation based on weak evidence, if not rumor, came to constitute the activity of a judicious demos protecting its rule from the disaffected, guilt could and often did adhere to anyone who refrained from making denouncements and provided an inducement to speak, however unreliably, about things overheard if not seen (Thuc. 3.82.4-5; 8.66).

In this climate of fear, suspicion, and information gathering, secret clubs (*synōmosiai*) successfully coordinated to overthrow democracy in 411 by using a two-step plan that included public intimidation and political propaganda (8.47-48.2; 8.54.4; 8.65).<sup>15</sup> Aristotle (1996) uses the events of 411 in the *Politics* to illustrate how deceit (*apatē*) can cause a regime to decay from the inside. A faction legally and strategically manipulates a democracy's institutions. Finding no resistance to its efforts, it then circumscribes the citizenry's power to rule. In Athens, Aristotle says, conspirators tricked the demos into "consenting to a change" to their own constitution, an alteration that the oligarchs subsequently maintained through force, the other way *stasis* comes about (*Pol.* 1304b; Thuc. 8.65-66). This means that the short-lived oligarchic takeover of 411 did not result from a violent and foreign-backed overthrow of the democratic regime, as the suspension of democracy by the Thirty in 404 did (Arist. *Ath. Pol.*, xxx-xxxiii). Instead, a deeply distrusting demos, invested in its own impotence, reconsolidated itself by means that accelerated the conditions of its own erosion.<sup>16</sup> For while the institutions of the assembly and council continued to meet after the demos decided to place power in the hands of 5,000 men, according to Aristotle, democracy was really controlled by the conspirators.

## Playing at Conspiracy: The Republic's Staging and Framing

In the unstable years leading up to and following 411, public discourse linked the private nighttime meetings of aristocratic fellowships (*hetaireiai*) to antidemocratic

factions and plots.<sup>17</sup> Plato's nocturnal gathering alludes to a meeting of a *hetaireia* and is the standard textual detail critics use to suggest that an illicit air seems to permeate the dialogue (Ober 1998; Zuckert 2009). Historically, these informal "dining or drinking clubs of congenial men, usually of roughly the same age and social standing" were "small enough to plan or act in confidence" because they gathered in houses (Connor 1971, 26, 27).<sup>18</sup> While these meetings were not "essentially or inevitably political, still less conspiratorial," they were suspected of fomenting oligarchic revolution during the war. As we saw above, in 411 these groups did successfully facilitate "sedition, assassination, and conspiracy to overthrow the government" (27). Yet, as Nicholas F. Jones argues, the "antithesis between innocent socializing and subversive conspiratorial political machination may be a false one." It is not clear that associations belonging to the aristocratic elite, who "had predominately oligarchical ideological tendencies," were "ever" "in any sense nonpolitical" (1999, 226-27).

The inherently blurry line between "mere" socializing and conspiring finds expression in the ambiguous staging of the *Republic*. Although it is not the only gathering in Plato's corpus to approximate a meeting convened by *hetaireiai* or *synōmotai*, the scene in the *Republic* acquires a particular political charge when considered in light of the dialogue's historical setting and its thematic concern with founding a just polis.<sup>19</sup> For Leo Strauss ([1964] 1978), whose reading foregrounds the wartime setting of the dialogue, Plato's staging suggests the difference between a private, philosophical discussion about politics and an antidemocratic plot could be easy if not strategically useful to elide in moments of democratic crisis. The *Apology*, set right after the war in 399, invokes a version of this tension. Socrates confirms at his trial that he socialized with antidemocratic conspirators. Yet he also lists conspiracies (*synōmosiai*) and conflicts (*staseis*) among the many things that others in the city value but that he neglects (36b). Given the private nature of Socrates' discussions and his proximity to conspirators, however, the "connection between his speech and others' actions" (Ober 2017, 86), which raised a deeper problem about what counts as incitement (to revolution), was impossible to resolve once and for all. One critical effect of

<sup>15</sup>See also the discussion in Teegarden (2013, 17-18).

<sup>16</sup>Athenians were "initially unable to work together in order to oppose the coup" despite their sense of being overtaken (Teegarden 2013, 17). Fears that an oligarchic conspiracy was widespread discouraged them from speaking out or with each other (Thuc. 8.66). Teegarden (2013) reads this as a political-coordination problem. Once democracy was restored, the demos attempted to counteract the passivity that had helped the Four Hundred assume power. They made citizens take the "oath of Demophantos" and swear to kill anyone who either overthrew the democracy or held office while it was being overthrown (Andoc. I.95-98).

<sup>17</sup>See Thuc. 8.54.4, Lysias 12.43-47.

<sup>18</sup>Historical studies of Athenian *hetaireiai* also include the definitive account of Calhoun (1913) and shorter discussions in Gottesman (2014) and Jones (1999).

<sup>19</sup>See also Plato's *Symposium*. Roisman (2006) points out that the terms for a secret plot are not necessarily pejorative—the most common is a *synōmosia*, literally, "a swearing together," which serves metonymically to designate a conspiracy.



the *Republic's* ambiguous framing on this view is to stage a question about the relationship between radical ideas and radical acts. However plausible, this view of the dramatic staging has the disadvantage of settling the meaning of Socrates' description of the night because it takes it at face value. Keeping the contextual details of the previous section in mind, I advance another way of reading the ambiguously conspiratorial staging that attends to the interplay between the text's form and content. This approach takes seriously the conspiratorial atmosphere of the dialogue's historical context and treats the illicitness of the scene as an irresolvable and constitutive feature of the text that casts its conspiratorial proposals in a new light.

In a reading of the *Republic*, Arlene Saxonhouse observes that "we do not know who the audience is for the long, long speech of Socrates. It certainly must be someone willing to listen to all ten books without apparent stop." She then pauses to wonder, "Is the *Republic* the long answer to his wife's question: 'Where were you last night?' What would it do to our reading of the dialogue if we read it as a sheepish excuse for a long night of carousing?" (2009, 731). The unspecified addressee of Socrates' speech, according to Saxonhouse, orients us to the multiple possible meanings of the narrative form. Though she has a domestic infelicity in mind, her proposal to think of his story as an excuse for something else bears directly on the sense of conspiratorial possibility I have been tracking. One effect of the unknown addressee is that it gives the reader reason to suspect the philosophical conversation might double as a coverup for something (more) illicit. Could the form and style of the recollected dialogue be alluding to a witness' account of a private nighttime gathering?<sup>20</sup>

There is, of course, nothing inherently conspiratorial about the recollected dialogic form or the unspecified addressee. These formal features acquire and

contribute specific political meaning to the arguments of the *Republic* when interpreted alongside its historical allusions, characterization, staging, and, most importantly, as we will see, its political themes: political founding; *stasis*; the political utility of plots; and the conspiratorial thought that political reality might be engineered efficiently, totally, and imperceptibly by rulers working, however deliberately, behind the scenes.<sup>21</sup> With this interplay in mind, how would our understanding of the dialogue change if we took seriously that the text simultaneously inspires *and* deflects the worry that something more (commonly feared) is afoot? Whether Socrates' narrative style is a way of conveying a suspicious mindset on the lookout for conspiracies or conjuring a political world rife with actual plots, the point is that the *Republic* pulls its audience into the distrustful mood of an eroding democracy in which what is said, overheard, and undertaken behind closed doors was acquiring increasing (if not central) political significance in public life. This formal feature is one of several ways in which the *Republic* performs the dynamics of its political realities. The interplay of the rhetorical and doctrinal registers of the text establishes a *topos* of political conspiracy. As I illustrate next, the dialogue's well-known arguments about deception and *stasis* in the *kallipolis* design begin to carry new meaning in this light. They double as immanent and creative redeployments of the eroding democratic realities of the dialogue's setting.

## Reading for the Interplay: Conspiratorial Form and Content

The literal terms denoting a conspiracy (*synōmosia*) and an aristocratic fellowship (*hetaireia*) appear only once in the *Republic*. These early references in Book II are crucial. They establish the parameters of the dialogue's subsequent and extensive concern with plots and conspiratorial thinking and introduce these issues as immanently Athenian and democratic. Having not yet begun to construct the *kallipolis* at this point, the dialogue is still exploring how Athenians conventionally understand and practice justice. Adeimantus imitates a typical young man who believes a mere "reputation for justice" brings a "wonderful life" and advocates forming "secret clubs [*synōmosias*] and societies [*hetaireias*]" to gain political

<sup>20</sup>We might compare Socrates' narrative to *On the Mysteries*, in which the orator Andocides—denounced and imprisoned for the profanation of the Mysteries and mutilation of the Herms—seeks immunity from punishment by giving evidence against his accomplices (MacDowell 1962). Like Socrates, he offers the names of the men present, including slaves (who were frequently brought in for questioning in exchange for immunity). He argues that the nighttime acts were meant as a pledge of loyalty among the group's members. But as Edwards observes, "the oligarchic leanings of Andocides' *hetaireia*" suggest that the group was attempting to prevent the departure of the fleet for Sicily and therefore "feared the strengthening of the democracy by a successful expedition" (1995, 13). According to Edwards (1995, 13n14), this does "not necessarily carry the further implication," voiced by Thucydides (6.27.3), "that they were attempting the overthrow of democracy," and yet it was enough to raise the public's suspicions. The fact that Plato's characterization seems to preclude an oligarchic conspiracy does not preclude the possibility that it would provoke public suspicion.

<sup>21</sup>In his reading of the *Republic*, Sagan sees in the text a "powerful paranoid anxiety" (1991, 145), which he takes as a response to a climate of oligarchic violence. The dialogue does not provide "an actual political program" but instead expresses a "paranoid" "cast of thought" (146).

influence and shape the perceptions of others (365b-c, 365d; see also *Ap.* 36b). The remarks insinuate that a quotidian practice of clandestine politicking does not so much endanger as preserve Athenian ideas about politics. Democratic Athens may claim to constitute itself through public acts of speech, but it also condones, because it is defined against, private gatherings that risk (being mistaken for) becoming cabals.<sup>22</sup> This is the first sign that a democratic regime contains within it the conditions of its own undermining. The dialogue will soon develop and explicitly extend this unstable dynamic to all actual regimes.

That one of the major claims of the dialogue—justice consists in being, not seeming, just—should emerge partly in response to this critical depiction of Athenian life deserves some attention. For despite attempts at distancing its own Athenian gathering from a real conspiratorial plot, the group does not go on to ban secret plotting from the *kallipolis*. Nor does it claim that collusion may be peculiar to democracies. Examples from Books III and V, explored below, instead explore two vital uses of plotting in the service of justice. First, a founding conspiratorial act organizes a new and just political world. Second, safeguarding this fragile arrangement depends on permanent practices of coordinated deception by the rulers. Keeping Adeimantus' remarks in mind, readers may find that the central role assigned to conspiratorial acts in the design of the *kallipolis* constitutes a critical reimagining rather than a wholesale rejection of the democratic dynamics of the dialogue's setting. Over and over, the dialogue invokes the political use of hidden, collectively maintained contrivances in an effort to prevent rather than induce political instability.

The relationship between conspiracy and political stability emerges most clearly in the discussion of the noble lie (*gennaion pseudos*, 414b-415).<sup>23</sup> The ability to establish the *kallipolis* will depend on the founders' success at persuading the city's members, including the first generation of rulers, if possible, to believe fully in a lie about their origins. Socrates presents this artifice (*mēchanē*,

414b) as an intentional conspiratorial effort by him and the other founders, his interlocutors, to protect the city from the change that always menaces a political regime. If rulers and ruled believe their places in a tripartite membership hierarchy are pregiven and fixed, they are less likely to grow dissatisfied with their places and desire political change. The conspiracy of the noble lie establishes the radical new regime of the *kallipolis* in a way that eliminates the possibility of revolutionary change. In this sense, the dialogue innovates on the *stasis* dynamics of its wartime Athenian setting. The conspiratorial mechanism that sets down a revolutionary form of rule is also a mechanism for impeding the *stasis* that typically incites conspiratorial acts against a regime. Reconceived to serve the supposedly beneficent ends of the regime in power, collective deception makes possible the pursuit of the dialogue's idea of "justice," just as it did in Adeimantus' account of the Athenian notion of justice.

The noble lie is only the first of several instances in which Socrates grants hidden forces a necessary and official part to play in preventing instability and constitutional alteration. The lie's maintenance by subsequent rulers *not* in the know turns out to require additional behind-the-scenes practices (e.g., testing, selecting, and breeding) for making this state of affairs look predictable and natural. But the threat of conflict and change nevertheless menaces the *kallipolis* order on other, related fronts. Following his proposal for the noble and myth of the metals, Socrates makes a "subsequent move to outlaw traditional families and private property among the guardians" in order to "reduce *stasis* in that [particular] group" and prevent its violent exploitation of the producer class (Bakewell 2019, 103; *Rep.* 424a). Book V's reconfiguration of kinship—"no parent shall know its own child" and "no child its own parent" (457d)—serves the dialogue's overarching goal of fixity by encouraging the guardians' identification with the (family of the) city over their biological kin.

The arguments about regulating procreation reprise the language of lying and deceit from the noble lie passages: "the rulers will need to employ a good deal of falsehood (*pseudei*) and deception (*apatē*) for the benefit of those they are ruling" (459c8-d2). An elaborate set of covert sexual and eugenic regulations is necessary for promoting same-mindedness (*homonoia*), ensuring unity, and averting *stasis*. By engineering that "the best men should have sex with the best women as often as possible" and the "worst" as infrequently as possible, the rulers will try to maintain the "quality" of the classes so that the "herd of our guardians" can be "as free as possible from dissension [*astasiastos*]" (459e). These practices assume that excellent qualities "observable in parents are

<sup>22</sup>The wishful tendency to associate stealthy machinations exclusively with authoritarianism is acknowledged in the reading of the noble lie offered by Williams, who observes that "deception remains a working tool of statecraft, even in the more contemporary democratic states" (2013, 364). From another angle, I have argued elsewhere that readers distance the foundational lying in the *Republic* from similar practices in Athenian democracy, thereby "rehearsing the very precondition for [Karl] Popper's view that (only) totalitarian regimes like the *kallipolis* are founded on a big lie" (2016, 345).

<sup>23</sup>Frank argues that in the *Republic*, the term *mēchanē* "refers consistently to exactly those things that make people see and believe what is not true" (2018, 64) because they are designed to deceive.



normally transmitted to offspring by the process of sexual reproduction,” as Peter Rose puts it. “At the same time,” however, “the guardians are exhorted to the most careful surveillance” to prevent “the breakdown” of this “inheritance principle” (Rose 1992, 354).

Much as we saw in the noble-lie passages, the breeding practices meant to stabilize the city require the adoption of additional secret mechanisms for reinforcing the lies, festivals, sacrifices, poems, and hymns already proposed and which carry within them the potential to fail in practice as well (459e–460e). One proposal stands out. “We must devise lotteries, I think—and pretty ingenious ones,” Socrates says, “so that every time there is a marriage the inferior type we want to exclude will blame chance rather than the rulers” (460a).<sup>24</sup> The lotteries will deflect attention from the rulers’ intentional practices of selecting and breeding by encouraging those selected and bred to blame “chance” (*tauchē*), rather than any particular individual, for their fate in marriage and procreation (460a).<sup>25</sup> Voiced as it is in a wartime context in which “the shift from democracy to oligarchy was brought about by the manipulation of Athens’ laws and procedures,”<sup>26</sup> Socrates’ use of the political language of lot drawing (*klēroi*) to describe the (deceptive) means by which unity and same-mindedness may be achieved is both fitting and striking. The passage repurposes the quintessentially democratic institution of the lottery, through which citizens actualize their political equality, to present randomness and the equal conditions it signifies as a hoax for maintaining unequal relations behind the scenes.<sup>27</sup> What are we to make of this? The proposal that a lottery might be used secretly to promote

inequality by an elite group calls us back to 411 when the demos only ostensibly ran the assembly and council. In that case, oligarchic conspirators took advantage of public fear and deceived the demos into consenting to a seemingly slight constitutional change. What the events of 411 and the *Republic* lottery proposal have in common is the enduring political dynamic they illustrate: a conventionally democratic institution is not an unequivocal sign of a democratic practice but a tool that may be used without notice to obstruct democratic ideals and advance the political aims of a repressive regime.

Just as the suspicious and eroding democratic realities of the dialogue’s wartime setting seem to inform the *kallipolis* design—with its appeals to plotting and conspiratorial thinking—so they seem to inform the explanations the characters find useful for persuading each other of that design. This may be clearest in the case of the allegory of the cave, the final and most intuitive example Socrates offers to illustrate to his group that it will be difficult to educate philosophers and bring the *kallipolis* into being.<sup>28</sup> Though rarely read as an emanation of a conspiratorial atmosphere, the thought experiment asks the interlocutors to imagine that human beings lived as prisoners in the cave of society, the fundamental conditions of which are constructed and maintained by puppeteers (*thaumatopoiois*, 514b). “Suppose,” Socrates says, that “nature [*phusis*] brought this state of affairs to end.” In this chance occurrence, a prisoner would come “untied” and be “compelled suddenly to stand up, turn his head, start walking, and look towards the light” (515c). Emancipation from bondage consists in a reorientation of the soul away from the shadows with which it is surrounded toward true understanding in the sunlit world outside the cave (518c). The philosopher is imagined to return to the cave in order to convince others that everything they have taken to be real is actually the effect of a fundamental, elaborate, and collectively maintained artifice. In this allegory, political change—founding a like-minded just society around a single notion of the good—depends first and foremost on an act of exposing widescale, collective manipulation. Once established,

been less difficult to accomplish if one colluded with the “presiding official”: “[H]ad two or three persons in authority been brought into the conspiracy it would have been perfectly feasible for one or more of the lots to have been so marked as to be discernible to the touch of those in the know. Admittedly, the sources preserve no concrete examples of the use of methods such as these, but for proof that it was common ... look [at] those provisions in the jury selection.” On the Athenian concern with avoiding the rigging process, see also Bers (2000).

<sup>28</sup>The previous example of the divided line is met with some confusion and dissatisfaction. “I sort of see,” Glaucon replies, “though not as well as I’d like” (511c4).

<sup>24</sup>I have altered Griffith’s translation slightly to bring out the contrived quality of the lotteries, which Socrates says are *poiēteoi*, “made or done” (460a).

<sup>25</sup>Deploying the same term for contrivance (*mēchanē* [414c]) that he does for the noble lie, Socrates immediately recommends that officers in the city also employ “every means they can think of to prevent” a woman who has recently given birth from recognizing “her own child,” including the use of other nursing women to serve as maternal decoys (460c). These passages propose a range of other practices of concealment, such as child exposure, that exploit oppositions of seen/unseen in the making of kin and, hence, the reproduction of the *kallipolis*’ membership order (461a–c).

<sup>26</sup>Carugati (2019, 49) is glossing Aristotle and Thucydides here.

<sup>27</sup>On lot as a constitutive feature of democracy, see Otañes’ contribution to the debate over regimes in Herodotus, which uses the different term *palos* (III.80–82). Aristotle describes the use of sortition (*klērountai*, *Ath. Pol.* 43.2) for the Athenian Council and courts. Staveley (1972, 116) notes that Athenians made sortition much more complex in the fourth century, when they used a *klēroterion*, or allotment machine, and probably “eliminated” opportunities to tamper with the operation (see also Aristophanes, *Eccles.* 681). Before this, in the fifth century (Staveley 1972, 115, 116), efforts at fraud “must have been common” and would have

however, the just regime premised on exposure depends for its maintenance on an act of coordinated concealment and rigging.

When Socrates finally addresses the question of the *kallipolis*' feasibility (*to dunaton*, 458a5), the verdict is, predictably, not good. The rulers will err in their regulation of marriages, the most obviously conspiratorial feature of the *kallipolis*, by fumbling the rigging of the lottery and uniting people who are undeserving of each other. *Stasis* will break out within the guardian class, Socrates says (545d). And although "it is no easy matter for a city founded in this way to be altered [*kinēthēsētai*]," he adds, "destruction awaits everything that has come to be." Eventually, even this foundation will decay and "break down [*luthēsetai*]" (546a3-5).<sup>29</sup> Although change can be slowed or accelerated, nothing can inoculate an on-the-ground polis against change (*kinēthēnai*), *stasis* (*sustasis*), and breakdown (*lusi*) (546a). In the end, every proliferating secret act designed to arrest change and impede political division is bound to fail to accomplish what it is tasked to do. Each one runs the risk of being outed and of undermining the fundamental purpose for which it is contrived. Erosion begins with the mismanagement of a deceitful institution devised by the rulers' own conspiracy.

## The Republic's Fourth-Century Target

In foregrounding the eroding and conspiratorial Athenian backdrop against which all these appeals to deception are organized and coordinated, I have attempted to show that the decaying political conditions of the dialogue's staging find expression in key dimensions of the *kallipolis* design. If I am right, then it is not merely the deceptions that populate the planning of the *kallipolis* that matter but the dialogue's conspiratorial setting in "real time" Athens that matters for Plato writing in "his time." This Athenian setting instigates not only the need to plot a city of permanent stability but also the need to show that the effort at permanent stability is bound to fail. What political force might this have carried in Plato's Athens?

Plato wrote the *Republic* (ca. 375 BCE) in a moment of general political stability. But the erosion and crises of Athenian democracy were only a few decades in the past and had profoundly shaped the political landscape of the early fourth century in which readers first encountered

the *Republic*. After the violent coup of the Thirty (404–403 BCE), Athenians descended into civil war. In its aftermath, both sides—supporters of the Thirty and proponents of democracy—attempted to refound a democratic order that would promote *homonoia* among citizens and neutralize the threat of polarization that had afflicted Athens during the Peloponnesian War (Funke 1980), ideals that, as we saw, sit at the heart of the *Republic*. As negotiations unfolded in an "atmosphere of distrust and smoldering hostility," they were initially "threatened from within, by a tide of divisive claims" (Carawan 2013, 22, 11).<sup>30</sup> Eventually, Athenians came to an agreement. They would afford "the formulation of legislation and law" a central role in the city's new constitutional structure (Carugati 2019, 43, 8). Citizens would look to existing laws to guide their actions in the assembly and law courts (Carawan 2013, 278).

Why might Athenians have concluded that these changes could safeguard democracy from polarization, erosion, and collapse? By the time of the Sicilian Expedition, frustrated and ambitious individuals had used democratic institutions to elevate themselves above the law and destabilize democracy from within. (The fifth-century ability to manipulate quintessentially democratic institutions against the regime also reverberates throughout the dialogue's *kallipolis* design.) These actions contributed to a waning of public confidence in the mechanisms of democratic rule (Carugati 2019, 45). The new constitutional structure constituted a response to this understanding of the causes of polarization and democratic erosion because it implemented a mechanism of restraint on the demos. Although Athenians would experience no open social conflict for two generations, the *Republic* suggests that their confidence in legalism was misplaced because they had misdiagnosed the underlying state of affairs.

The *Republic* seems to share the postwar aim of regulating the diversity of interests and ideas among the ruling class that make possible disagreement, dissatisfaction, plotting, and political collapse. But the roadmap it recommends—educating and arranging a citizenry in accordance with a singular notion of the just—is an implicit critique of the postwar solution. In Socrates' hands, a new political foundation conducive of stability and like-mindedness involves nothing less than the total overhaul of collective life. Laws are tools and, in an unideal regime, they will be used by people with differing ideas of what

<sup>29</sup>I have altered Griffith's translation of *luthēsetai*.

<sup>30</sup>In the fourth century, however, other Greek cities continued to experience *stasis* provoked by conspiracies. For example, in 370 BC, *stasis* broke out in Argos after a conspiracy to overthrow its democracy was exposed. See Diod. XV 57.3-58; Isoc., *Philippus* 52.

the just entails in any particular case (Ober 1998, 231–32). Athenian recourse to existing statutes, then, could never solve this problem from the *Republic's* perspective. “Unless those responsible for implementing the laws ... fuse the diverse interests present in the polis into a single, unitary will,” as Josiah Ober explains, a polis will alter from what the “founders had intended” (1998, 232). Laws not only appear inadequate to establish same-mindedness. They simply defer the problem of conflict. Even a regime like the *kallipolis*, expressly designed to achieve stability at all costs, is said to decay once actualized. The point that neither change nor conflict can be eradicated may be easier to appreciate from the vantage point of uncertainty and intermittent crisis the *Republic* dramatizes, but it is just as if not more pressing to confront within a relatively stable context like Plato's Athens. For although the *Republic* is not explicitly concerned with preserving democracy, we may put its general arguments about regime change in the service of it. They remind us of the importance of staying vigilant against democratic decay.

## Conclusion

Socrates pauses frequently to acknowledge the implausibility of the *kallipolis* plan and asks whether it is foolish to continue pursuing it (in discussion). The few vocal interlocutors in the room that night always respond with a dutiful “no.” These asides are important. They afford opportunities to emphasize the noninstrumental value of theory—an ideal arrangement is worth exploring despite its unlikelihood in practice and so on. Read through and against the play of conspiracy, however, the “fantastical” character of the *kallipolis* begins to carry another meaning (Ferrari 2000, xvi).

When Socrates reaches for the allegory of the cave or suggests that political power would ideally work in a systematic and secretive way through the use of a noble lie, he expresses the idealizing, comforting, and conspiratorial thought—appealing in times of great uncertainty—that power really could work with “exactness and efficiency” (Marasco 2016, 238). But to claim, as he also does, that politics on the ground does not work this way is ultimately to present the desire for permanent fixity as a fantasy. The *Republic* suggests that an eroding democratic world can and often does induce a desire to seek solace in totalizing political explanations, certainty, and repressiveness. On the preceding reading, the text takes a further step to offer the more salutary point that an eroding democracy affords critical terrain for seeing such permanent stability is illusory. Where do we go from here?

Plato may seem at first glance like a surprising figure to enlist in a discussion of how democracies die. Famous for writing dialogues criticizing democracy, he is, within political science, still routinely credited more for providing arguments against democracy and political change and less for offering instructive explorations of these themes. But by the end of the Peloponnesian War, Athenian democracy had finally “succumbed to the joint pressure of coups and institutional erosion, the two leading causes of contemporary democracies' death” (Carugati 2019, 7). Whatever the differences between ancient and modern democracy, the symptoms of contemporary political decay—severe polarization, waning confidence in public institutions, and a pervasive interest in conspiratorial explanations for political life (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018, 18; Runciman 2018)—are all present in the democratic context Plato uses to stage the *Republic*. The narrated dialogue provides a heuristic rendering of what some people living under different eroding democratic conditions might sound like, talk about, desire, and fear. We might look to Plato today, then, precisely because his political theory is both historical and literary.

In recent years, political scientists have sought to understand the gradual and seemingly imperceptible changes that lead democracies in advanced liberal societies to break down or backslide from the inside into “political systems that are ambiguously democratic or hybrid” without showing “manifest signs” that they are eroding (Bermeo 2016, 5, 6; Przeworski 2019, 15). Although understandably worried that democracies may be exhibiting an “incipient decline” worldwide, some thinkers still appear wedded to the notion that democracy, as a regime type, moves along a “progressive arc” (Diamond 2015, 142; Rosenblum and Muirhead 2019, 166). Democracies are “vulnerable to crises” on this view because democracy is a “recent and still rare” regime type (Przeworski 2019, 16). In time and with the right design, real-world democracies would inoculate themselves once and for all against the kind of change that induces erosion from within.

A reading that places the *Republic's* play of conspiracy at its center and restores the dialogue to its volatile Athenian setting directly contravenes this view. Plato's dialogue does not furnish a practical solution for eradicating change, polarization, plotting, and breakdown. No matter how well or prolifically a regime crafts and recrafts its institutional mechanisms, constitutional design cannot rid political life of its inherent contingency or the possibility of dissent. Why might that be? Each of the mechanisms designed as a bulwark against change is shown over the course of the conversation to constitute

an independent form of action with indeterminate effects. Each act, a life of its own. Regardless of what these mechanisms are intended to do, their proliferation does not so much reduce as multiply the forms of contingency at play. With this, the *Republic* offers an important warning about the tendency, still prevalent in contemporary studies of democracy, to regard a regime as a static or progressively ameliorating political form. The desire to exert total mastery over political life appears in Plato's hands as a wishful fantasy, born of a conspiratorial moment, that fails to realize itself in practice. In the end, what the conspiracy to stop all conspiracies makes clear is that there can be no end to political change.

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## El cuidado de sí mismo a través de los otros según los diálogos aporéticos de Platón<sup>1</sup>

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**Resumen.** Este artículo aborda el carácter terapéutico de la filosofía socrática según los diálogos aporéticos de Platón. Considero que la terapia de Sócrates es un cuidado de sí mismo cuyo ejercicio se lleva a cabo con los otros de manera dialéctica, por lo cual la naturaleza de sí mismo no es nunca resultado de una reflexión aislada, sino una búsqueda constante a través del diálogo. Para ello es necesario aclarar el sentido de la relación que establece el diálogo socrático, la estructura de la pregunta terapéutica y el objetivo que motiva la terapia socrática.

**Palabras clave:** diálogo; voluntad; consejo; terapia; sí mismo.

### [en] Care of the self through the others according to Plato's aporetic dialogues

**Abstract.** In this paper I focus on the therapeutic nature of Socratic philosophy according to Plato's aporetic dialogues. I consider that Socrates therapy is a care of the self whose exercise is carried out with others in a dialectical way. Thus, the nature of the self is never the result of an isolated reflection, but a constant search through dialogue. It will be necessary to clarify the meaning of the relationship established by the Socratic dialogue, the structure of the therapeutic question and the objective that motivates Socratic therapy.

**Keywords:** dialogue; will; council; therapy; self.

**Sumario:** 1. Introducción; 2. El foco del cuidado filosófico de Sócrates; 3. La dimensión comunal del diálogo; 4. Intención y posibilidad de la pregunta socrática; 5. La farmacología del cuidado dialéctico; 6. El diálogo como consejo; 7. Conclusión; 8. Referencias bibliográficas.

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## 1. Introducción

Que la filosofía pueda considerarse como un ejercicio terapéutico no es una idea novedosa. Se podría decir que Sócrates es el primer analogado de la idea de “filósofo terapeuta”. En efecto, él encarna la inquietud, la preocupación y el cuidado de sí mismo y de los otros de manera inexcusable. Epicuro, por su parte, atribuyó al filosofar una función terapéutica sin la cual la filosofía misma habría sido para él algo inútil.<sup>3</sup> Musonio Rufo afirma, además, que “los que pretenden salvarse han de vivir siempre curándose (θεραπευόμενος)” (1995, p. 153 [frag. 36]). Marco Aurelio, a su vez, puede referirse a la necesidad de un cuidado (θεραπεία) de la “divinidad interior” que consiste en “preservarla pura de pasión, de irreflexión y de disgusto” (1977, II, 13). Este aspecto ético de las antiguas filosofías fue consustancial a su desarrollo teórico.<sup>4</sup> Incluso podría decirse que la ética fue la propia sustancia del filosofar antiguo siempre inmerso en su presente. Pese a que eventualmente las comunidades cristianas fueron absorbiendo este rasgo ético esencial que tenían las antiguas escuelas, la filosofía nunca olvidó su razón práctica. De ahí que Baltasar Gracián en el siglo XVII haya podido decir: “¿de qué sirve el saber si no es práctico? Y el saber vivir es hoy el verdadero saber” (2013, p. 229).

En los llamados diálogos aporéticos de Platón se puede reconocer la función terapéutica de la filosofía, aunque en un sentido distinto a las escuelas griegas y romanas que se sienten herederas igualmente de Sócrates, y diferente también, por cierto, de la psicoterapia u otras disciplinas de orientación y asesoramiento filosófico que han venido proliferando hoy en día. En los diálogos platónicos Sócrates ejerce terapéuticamente la filosofía, aunque esta terapia sólo puede comprenderse en base exclusiva a la dialéctica propia del diálogo.

Algunos comentaristas han comprendido las diversas terapias socráticas de los diálogos a partir de un enfoque evolucionista del pensamiento de Platón<sup>5</sup>. Álvaro Vallejo Campos (2016), por ejemplo, distingue tres fases en este desarrollo y argumenta que la filosofía terapéutica de Platón se desenvuelve desde el temprano y socrático diálogo *Apología*, donde habría una terapia enfocada exclusivamente al alma individual, pasando por el diálogo transicional *Gorgias*, donde la terapia sería un arte político, hasta el diálogo intermedio *República*, en el cual habría una terapia holística llevada a cabo por Platón con respecto al carácter utópico de la ciudad ideal (p. 227). Esto significa que la actitud de Sócrates en los diálogos habría cambiado radicalmente en relación a la verdad desde la *Apología* hasta la *República*, lo cual sería correlativo a la transformación de su carácter (el de Sócrates como portavoz de Platón) al pasar de ser un médico del alma a un médico de la cultura (p. 223).

<sup>3</sup> “Vano es el discurso de aquel filósofo por quien no es curada ninguna afección del ser humano. Pues justamente como no asiste a la medicina ninguna utilidad si no busca eliminar las enfermedades de los cuerpos, igualmente tampoco de la filosofía si no busca expulsar la afección del alma” (1995, p. 117 [D 54]).

<sup>4</sup> Para este enfoque terapéutico de la filosofía véase P. Hadot (1995), M. Foucault (2005), M. Nussbaum (1994). Véase también: Mace (1999), Carlisle and Ganeri (2010), Fischer (2011, pp. 49-82), Omelchenko (2012, pp. 73-81), Banicki (2014, pp. 7-31). En relación a la terapia socrática consultar Cushman (1958), Lampe (2010) y Suvák (2018). Resulta también interesante consultar a Laín Entralgo (1958) respecto al sentido de la cura por la palabra dentro del mundo griego en general. En relación a los significados de la palabra *θεραπεία* véase Liddle and Scott (1996, pp. 792-793). En este artículo la palabra terapia será vertida como cuidado.

<sup>5</sup> La perspectiva “evolucionista” o “genética” relativa al pensamiento de Platón proviene de Karl Friedrich Hermann (*Geschichte und System der Platonischen Philosophie*, Heidelberg, 1839). Para un análisis de esta perspectiva véase Tigerstedt (1974, p. 25ss).

Por esta razón, Vallejo Campos detecta en Platón “un cambio muy importante en la concepción de la filosofía como terapia” (p. 230).

En contraste a esto, yo sugiero, en primer lugar, que lo que ocurre en los diálogos no es tanto el desarrollo intelectual del autor como el drama del personaje Sócrates. Al ser el diálogo platónico en cada caso una muestra de la interacción de Sócrates con diversos personajes y, a su vez, al ser el cuidado socrático un modo de vida superior a través del diálogo, el contenido de cada debate sólo podrá ser plenamente comprendido a la luz de la naturaleza dialéctica del pensamiento de Platón. Los interlocutores, de acuerdo al pensamiento platónico, no son meros accesorios en el debate, sino puntos de vista que poseen un sentido dramático del todo significativos, pues en éstos se revela que el contenido de cada diálogo depende de su forma.<sup>6</sup> De ahí que cada asunto en el diálogo platónico y la forma por la cual Platón lo trata corresponda al carácter de los interlocutores que están en juego (Blondell, 2003). Por ello, si Sócrates puede llevar a cabo su terapia de distintos modos, es porque lo exige el carácter de cada interlocutor con el cual Sócrates se encuentra. En ese sentido, resulta notable la advertencia del neoplatónico Hermias. En efecto, tomando en cuenta lo que Sócrates refiere en el *Fedro* (271d, 277b-c), él afirma que al haber “muchas diferencias en los caracteres y prácticas de las almas, él [Sócrates] beneficia a cada uno de manera diferente, al joven de un modo, al sofista de otro modo, extendiendo sus manos a todos y exhortándolos a practicar la filosofía” (1,1.1-5).<sup>7</sup> La especial sensibilidad al texto platónico de este intérprete sugiere que la experiencia terapéutica de la filosofía es el resultado de la dinámica y de los límites del λόγος, λόγος que en cada ocasión interactúa a través de los interlocutores abriendo determinadas direcciones y vías de investigación.

Ahora bien, el cuidado de Sócrates no es terapéutico porque mediante el tratamiento dialógico el interlocutor pueda llegar a descubrir “su” verdad. La terapia de Sócrates, por de pronto, ha de explicarse con base en un diálogo por el cual ambos interlocutores pueden conjuntamente procurarse un bien (*Gorgias*, 505e-506a). En ese sentido, el diálogo, si es capaz de procurar un bien para ambos interlocutores, lo hará a través de las razones que el otro da y conforme a la *responsabilidad* del otro como base de la terapia socrática. Por lo tanto, si cada diálogo platónico puede ser interpretado de acuerdo al ἥθος del interlocutor, entonces un enfoque al cuidado de Sócrates tiene que tomar en cuenta al otro con base en sus motivaciones, intenciones y deseos. Es más, si el diálogo es posible, Sócrates tiene que volver transparente lo que el interlocutor *quiere*. El cuidado socrático, por lo tanto, acompaña a la voluntad del otro, pues en ella se revela quién es él (*Gorgias*, 491e-492e). Pero quién sea él se desprenderá de lo que quiera responder (*República*, 340c). Dicho estrictamente, el interlocutor revelará lo que quiere al dar razón de sí mismo mediante el diálogo (*Laques*, 187e-188c).

En el siguiente artículo intentaré dejar en claro qué significa la terapia de

<sup>6</sup> Este enfoque que F. Schleiermacher en los tiempos modernos puso de relieve, pero que ya resultaba operativo en muchos comentaristas antiguos, se centra en la estructura del diálogo y ha sido expresado con gran riqueza a partir del desarrollo de la fenomenología y la hermenéutica. De una manera ejemplar se puede consultar, por una parte, la interpretación de Wolfgang Wieland (1999), cuyo trabajo consiste en destacar la estructura no proposicional de los modos de conocimiento y, por otra parte, la propuesta de Stanley Rosen de una “fenomenología dramática” (1983, 1-57).

<sup>7</sup> De ahí que Henry Teloh llame a este enfoque “el principio del *Fedro*” y por el cual “diferentes naturalezas psíquicas requieren diferentes *logoi* para su propia educación” (1986, p. 26).

Sócrates en lo que concierne a los llamados diálogos aporéticos. Tendré que dejar aparte el importante aspecto del δαίμόνιον y la naturaleza erótica de Sócrates con el fin de enfocarme en la estructura dialéctica del cuidado socrático.<sup>8</sup> A partir de una interpretación en clave terapéutica, será posible situar el diálogo socrático dentro de su dimensión comunal. Esto nos permitirá comprender la intención y la posibilidad de la pregunta que plantea Sócrates, la pregunta por el “es” de cierta virtud. Finalmente, podremos comprender cómo este cuidado de Sócrates permite que el interlocutor reconozca su auténtica voluntad.

## 2. El foco del cuidado filosófico de Sócrates

En la *Apología*, momento crucial de la vida de Sócrates, éste dice a sus conciudadanos que su única intención fue la de exhortar a cada uno a cuidar de sí mismo mediante la pregunta por la virtud (36c-38a) (Cf. De Bravo, 2019). Sócrates, planteando la pregunta por lo que sea la virtud, examina y refuta a sus interlocutores con el fin de instarlos a que sean responsables de sí mismos (29e-30a). Pero ¿qué significa este “sí mismo” que exige cuidado y en qué relación se encuentra con la virtud? Este sí mismo aparentemente sería el alma del interlocutor (*Alcibiades*, 130e). Sin embargo, con tal identificación el problema no queda resuelto. De hecho, este sí mismo al cual se refiere Sócrates se vuelve mucho más cuestionable si lo identificamos meramente con el alma.

Sócrates realizaba en privado<sup>9</sup> lo que consideraba ser el más grande beneficio que podía procurarle a sus conciudadanos, a saber, intentar persuadir a cada uno “de no procurar hacer nada antes de cuidar de sí mismo lo mejor y lo más prudentemente posible, ni tampoco de procurar atender las cosas públicas de la ciudad, sino cuidar de la ciudad misma” (36c).<sup>10</sup> Sócrates no acusa a sus conciudadanos de ser perezosos o desatentos. Lo que las palabras de Sócrates implican es que los atenienses se encontraban preocupados por cosas que impiden el cuidado de sí mismos. Los atenienses estaban preocupados por sí mismos, pero de tal modo que ellos sólo y únicamente podían hacerlo “de espaldas al fuego”, para recurrir a la imagen del *simil de la caverna*, porque se *identificaban* con las opiniones de las cosas públicas. De ahí que la exhortación de Sócrates no radicara en producir un cuidado en los otros, sino, más bien, en provocar en los otros un cambio en la dirección de la mirada. Este cambio sería, así, un giro desde los asuntos en los cuales los atenienses se habían absorbido hacia sí mismos. Sócrates, sin embargo, enfatiza que esta redirección de la mirada implica suspender el cuidado de los asuntos relativos a la πόλις y volver la mirada a la πόλις misma. Esto es muy significativo. El cuidado al que Sócrates apela no consiste en cortar la relación con los otros, ni en la separación de las cosas públicas para volverse hacia el solitario reducto de la conciencia individual. El

<sup>8</sup> Sobre estos aspectos de la figura de Sócrates, véase Benardete (1953), Belfiore (2012) y Jedrkiewicz (2018, pp. 299-318).

<sup>9</sup> El hecho de que Sócrates filosofe en privado con otros no significa que lleve a cabo conversaciones solo en espacios cerrados. La filosofía de Sócrates exige un *contacto personal cercano*, dentro de una casa o en el ágora. Sócrates nunca se dirige a la masa o usa procedimientos públicos para exhortar a los otros, aunque él mismo lo haga excepcionalmente a su modo en su apología (*Apología*, 31d5-32a3). Cf. Long (2014, pp. 8-18).

<sup>10</sup> Todas las traducciones se basan, a veces con ligeras variantes, sobre la versión de los *Diálogos* (2011) de Gredos.

cuidado socrático, a mi juicio, consiste en interrumpir el trato con las cosas de la πόλις y suspender las cosas aparentemente concernientes al individuo con el fin de volver la mirada únicamente a sí mismo, sí-mismidad que no pertenece tanto a las cosas de la πόλις como a la πόλις misma.

Sócrates distingue, por una parte, las cosas que tienen que ver con la πόλις, a saber, el negocio, el cuidado de la propia casa, el puesto militar, la participación pública (*Apología*, 36b), así como los correspondientes pareceres y deseos que estas actividades generan, y, por otra parte, el sí mismo y la πόλις misma. Sócrates no comprende el sí mismo como un ente aislado e individualizado frente a una πόλις externa, sino como un modo de ser, una manera de encontrarse a sí mismo en la comunidad política.<sup>11</sup> En ese sentido, Sócrates no sólo habría establecido una diferencia entre sí mismo y los asuntos relativos a sí mismo, sino también entre la πόλις misma y los asuntos políticos. Por lo tanto, si comprendemos este sí mismo como alma y la πόλις como mundo, entonces no cabe separar ambos fenómenos como dos entes que a veces permanecen o no conectados, sino como términos correlativos y copertenecientes. Pero ¿esto significa que el alma se identificaría con su mundo? Sí mismo y πόλις estarían originalmente ensamblados, aunque esta co-origenariedad no estaría exenta del problema fundamental de su unidad.<sup>12</sup> La atención a sí mismo y a la πόλις misma, a la cual está apelando Sócrates, resulta ser un cuidado de sí mismo en conjunto. Esto significa que uno sólo se conoce a sí mismo mejor y uno sólo sabe lo que propiamente quiere a través de ejercitar un cuidado con el otro. Como intentaré mostrar este cuidado mutuo toma una forma concreta cuando los interlocutores *celebran consejo* entre ellos. En consecuencia, el sí mismo no parece ser algo individual, ni mucho menos es el alma como un ente encapsulado, sino, más bien, un modo de ser originariamente político.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. La dimensión comunal del diálogo

A mi juicio, lo que parece encontrarse en relación íntima con el cuidado de sí mismo es la συνουσία. La συνουσία puede ser entendida como co-existencia o ser-con,

<sup>11</sup> La πόλις no radica en una situación geográfica ni tampoco consiste en un conjunto de procesos meramente administrativos. Aristóteles señala que la πόλις no tiene que ver con los límites de sus murallas (*Política*, 1276a25-26), por lo cual no es una localidad física, sino, más bien, un espacio de apertura donde los hombres se muestran los unos a los otros y en donde se reconocen a sí mismos como hombres a partir del ejercicio de la virtud. En la medida que cada uno tiene una función, pues el bien y la actividad radican en la función (*Ética a Nicómaco*, 1097b26-28), la πόλις se comprenderá como un espacio en el cual los hombres aparecen ejerciendo sus propias funciones en relación a un bien (*Política*, 1252a2). Por lo tanto, el significado principal de la πόλις reside en su carácter de ensamble y cuyo orden configura las partes de una manera orgánica.

<sup>12</sup> Este doble enfoque, a saber, el sí mismo y la πόλις misma, no implica que haya una identidad, sino una cierta unidad. Esta unidad, sin embargo, deviene profundamente controvertida de acuerdo a la así llamada “analogía del alma y la πόλις” en la *República* y que nace en el libro II para luego ser evaluada y modificada en el libro IX (Cf. Roochnik, 2003, pp. 10-30).

<sup>13</sup> Se podría decir que Sócrates mismo es el ejemplo del individuo, pero considero que la palabra “individuo” para retratar a Sócrates es equívoca. Sócrates es un ejemplo, pero no del individualismo. En la *Apología* Sócrates le dice a sus conciudadanos que el dios usa su nombre y lo pone como ejemplo como si dijera: Es el más sabio, el que, de entre vosotros, hombres, conoce, como Sócrates, que en verdad es digno de nada respecto a la sabiduría” (23b). Sócrates no es el individuo por antonomasia, sino el ejemplo de la fundamental negatividad del ser humano. Por esta razón, Sócrates es ἀπορος (*Hippias Mayor*, 304c; *Menón*, 80c) y ἀποπώτατός, a saber, el hombre más dislocado (*Teeteto*, 149a).



que es el modo fundamental de ser al que Sócrates apela. Sócrates no se aleja de la tradición al invitar a co-existir, pero radicaliza en forma y contenido la unidad política griega. ¿Qué quiere decir *συνουσία*? Tradicionalmente *συνουσία* “se refiere a la constante asociación de una generación más joven a hombres mayores y más cabales” (Robb, 1994, p. 197). En ese sentido, “los jóvenes escuchaban, absorbían tanto la sabiduría acumulada como las habilidades de los mayores y buscaban imitar sus virtudes” (Ibidem). Esta co-existencia mediante el vínculo de la enseñanza, por lo tanto, constituye el eslabón entre las generaciones de la antigua *πόλις*. Con Sócrates la co-existencia toma un significado exclusivamente dialógico<sup>14</sup>. La co-existencia socrática no sólo difiere de la *συνουσία* entre el adulto y el adolescente y por la cual la *πόλις* se mantenía unida, sino también difiere de aquella *συνουσία* promovida por los sofistas, quienes educaban a los hombres y percibían dinero por ello (*Apología*, 19d-20a). El ser-con tradicional, por el cual la gimnasia y la música moldeaban el carácter, no era suficiente para Sócrates como fundamento de la *πόλις*. Tampoco lo era la *συνουσία* del sofista, quien requería únicamente que el joven estuviese atento a su largo monólogo instructivo (*Protágoras*, 318e-319a). La *συνουσία* socrática requiere que tanto jóvenes como mayores participen en el diálogo. En tanto el ser-con se encuentra basado en el diálogo, el cuidado de sí mismo deviene dialéctico. Como Bosch-Veciana lo dice con gran discreción, “para Sócrates, el pensamiento no es autosuficiente, sino que está constituido en comunión con el otro, lo cual es la verdadera *συνουσία*, la presencia real del otro” (2004, p. 40). De acuerdo a Sócrates, sólo dialogando sobre la virtud la vida adquiere su propia virtud y claridad.

Según lo anteriormente dicho, el cuidado de Sócrates no consiste en una relación entre un experto y un estudiante. Contra lo que Terence Irwin afirma (1977, p. 75) Sócrates no cuenta con una *τέχνη*, un conocimiento técnico por medio del cual él haga del hombre un buen ciudadano (*Protágoras*, 319a). Sin embargo, Sócrates es un maestro. Pero no es ese tipo de maestro que transfiere información a sus discípulos ni un maestro que es superior a los otros en términos epistemológicos (*Apología*, 33a-b). De acuerdo a G. A. Scott la filosofía socrática es un “interrogatorio entre dos personas, [...] una puesta a prueba y un escrutinio frente al otro, cuya necesaria franqueza funciona como espejo del propio carácter” (2000, p. 154). Este ejercicio resulta posible por la conciencia de Sócrates de su ignorancia acerca del conocimiento de la virtud.<sup>15</sup> Esta conciencia lo habilita, por una parte, a estar alerta de los límites de la sabiduría humana y, por otra parte, a escuchar el *λόγος*. En ese sentido Sócrates es un maestro, porque él es capaz de escuchar mejor que sus interlocutores, en la medida que el diálogo consiste fundamentalmente en obedecer el discurso,<sup>16</sup> en ir tras la huella del argumento (*Critón*, 48c7; *Fedro*, 274a4; *República*, 365d2). Al escuchar el *λόγος* Sócrates y sus interlocutores evalúan y discriminan si ellos se encuentran dirigidos a la virtud de un buen modo o de un modo deficiente durante el diálogo.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Respecto al uso de *συνουσία* por Platón véase Tarrant (2005, pp. 133-138).

<sup>15</sup> Este punto es muy importante, porque varios comentaristas han identificado la negación del conocimiento de la virtud por parte de Sócrates como irónica. Cf. Magrini (2018, pp. 30-38).

<sup>16</sup> Aristóteles en la *Ética a Nicómaco* afirma que “tener *λόγος*” significa en un sentido ser capaz de escuchar al *λόγος*, es decir, de obedecerlo (1120b20).

<sup>17</sup> De acuerdo a Plutarco “la virtud sólo puede ser proporcionada por los oídos” (*De Recta Ratione Audiendi*, 38b).

La filosofía socrática es un cuidado de sí mismo, cuya actividad se desarrolla como un diálogo entre interlocutores que son ambos buscadores y mutuamente examinadores. Sin embargo, se podría insistir en que la evidente superioridad de Sócrates es una objeción a la afirmación sobre el cuidado mutuo proporcionado por el diálogo. Pero el magisterio de Sócrates no viene de una técnica determinada y si tuviese alguna, este conocimiento no cancelaría su estado de ἀπορία (*Menón*, 80c), pues lo que Sócrates tiene ante todo presente es precisamente que no sabe. Sócrates está siempre buscando con los otros (*Cármides*, 165b-c; *Menón*, 80d; *Gorgias*, 505e-506a; *Protágoras*, 348a-349a) y cada vez se beneficia de alguna manera de la conversación (*Hippias Mayor*, 304e). Sócrates co-participa y aprende conjuntamente en la persecución de una comprensión de la virtud como un fenómeno elusivo.<sup>18</sup> Sócrates es un buscador, el más incansable buscador entre los interlocutores, porque, como Jaspers afirma, “la esencia de la filosofía [socrática] no es la posesión de la verdad, sino la indagación de la verdad (1954, p. 12). El núcleo de la συνουσία socrática se vuelve evidente en la dialéctica del diálogo como búsqueda conjunta de la verdadera virtud.

Por lo tanto, lo que constituye la συνουσία socrática es la práctica del diálogo, a saber, el dar y recibir λόγος, cuya cooperación revela un cuidado de sí mismo, incluso cuando el diálogo da ocasión al malentendido y el desacuerdo. Con todo, el diálogo de Sócrates constituye el espacio de cuidado a través de la palabra compartida. Para comprender con mayor claridad este cuidado dialéctico de la filosofía socrática, es ahora necesario explicar la intención y la posibilidad de la pregunta filosófica.

#### 4. Intención y posibilidad de la pregunta socrática

El diálogo es un cuidado de sí mismo a través del cual Sócrates pregunta algo y el otro responde. Todo preguntar, como Heidegger lo ha indicado con claridad (1997, p. 30), implica: (1) lo preguntado, por ejemplo, el conocimiento o la virtud; (2) a quién se dirige la pregunta (el interrogado), acaso Teeteto o Hipócrates; (3) lo que se pone en cuestión en lo preguntado (¿qué es...?), a saber, el sentido del “es” del conocimiento o el “es” de la virtud. Y por último, pero no menos importante, (4) quien pregunta, Sócrates (el interrogador). En tanto Sócrates, consciente de no saber, plantea la correspondiente pregunta, inicia y participa de la interrogación. Al poner en cuestión el “es” de lo preguntado, Sócrates busca algo con el interlocutor y, así, presta toda su atención a quien responde. La pregunta por el “es” de lo preguntado y cuyo conocimiento es buscado, se dirige al interrogado como aquel que *ya tiene* un parecer sobre el bien, como aquel que *ya se comporta* respecto a las cosas buenas y también malas. Lo que el interlocutor cree que es verdad acerca de la moderación, por ejemplo, y lo que en cada caso él considera bueno y mejor, se encontrará en relación al modo como el interlocutor se *ya encuentra dispuesto* y a *cómo* él se mueve con las cosas que exigen moderación. En cualquier caso, ya sea que la opinión del interlocutor sobre el asunto en cuestión se encuentre de acuerdo o no con su propio

<sup>18</sup> En *Alcibiades* Sócrates le dice a éste: “...debemos... perfeccionarnos. Porque lo que yo digo sobre cómo hay que educarse no es distinto para ti que para mí” (124b-c). La terapia socrática como un cuidado mutuo de sí mismo es también entendido por D. Halperin como “reciprocidad erótica” (1986, pp. 60-80). Por su parte, A. Hooper, dice: “Como amante cada uno se enfuerza hacia el bien y como amado cada uno tiene el deber de cuidar al otro y ayudarse” (2012, p. 109).

comportamiento y padecer, lo que establece el cuidado socrático en primer lugar es que el interlocutor *al responder se exhibe a sí mismo de algún modo*. El interlocutor se exhibe a partir de sus creencias y deseos, con cuya identificación puede él responder a la pregunta. En correspondencia, Sócrates habla de sí mismo en una ocasión como un partero que, al interrogar por el “es” de algo, pone al descubierto al interlocutor en orden a discriminar si lo que éste da a luz es fecundo o una mera fantasmagoría (*Teeteto*, 149b-151b).

De acuerdo a lo anterior, se vuelve fútil plantear con respecto al diálogo la separación entre un sujeto cognoscente y un objeto independiente por conocer, en cada caso, la virtud, el conocimiento, la belleza o la piedad. El hecho de que el interrogado (*Teeteto*) se interese por lo preguntado o que, en cambio, la pregunta le parezca obvia e insignificante (*Hippias*, *Eutifrón*, *Laques*), pone de manifiesto que no existe una brecha entre el interrogado y lo preguntado. Tanto la diligencia como el descuido y la presunción dan cuenta que el interrogado y lo preguntado ya se encuentran bajo una cierta relación (Kirkland, 2012, p. 26). La transparencia de esta relación, a saber, la del que responde con aquello sobre lo cual responde, dependerá sólo y únicamente del modo como el interrogado se encuentra *concernido* por el “es” de lo preguntado. En ese sentido, lo que se encuentra en juego en el diálogo es *cómo* responde el interrogado, pues, de acuerdo a su modo de esforzarse por la verdad, se volverán transparentes para el interrogado tanto sus propios límites como su alcance cognoscitivo (*Teeteto*, 186a-187c).

Esto significa, entonces, que el interrogado, a través de los intentos de responder a la pregunta, de algún modo puede transparentarse a sí mismo al buscar el “es” que se encuentra puesto en cuestión. Por ejemplo, si Cármides responde que la moderación *es* calma (*Cármides*, 159b), no se debe sino a que él *es capaz* de estar calmado ante determinadas situaciones, como así pareciera su fama dar testimonio de ello. El “es” en cada pregunta socrática correspondería, tal como se declara en el *Sofista*, a la δύνανμις (247 e4),<sup>19</sup> poder, capacidad, posibilidad, no meramente lógica, sino, discursiva y ética. El “es” que está puesto en juego en la pregunta corresponde, por lo tanto, al modo de la respuesta, cuyo contenido veritativo no depende tanto de la corrección de los enunciados del interlocutor como de la dirección de su propio comportamiento en relación a lo que responde. De ahí que pueda suceder aquella paradoja según la cual el mismo Sócrates, pese a no ser capaz de responder plenamente a las propias preguntas que plantea, pueda, sin embargo, comportarse virtuosamente, tanto al dialogar como al tratar con los otros.

Si el interlocutor al responder a la pregunta de Sócrates por el “es” ya se ha identificado con los contenidos de las proposiciones que enuncia, entonces su

<sup>19</sup> Aún cuando este artículo se encuentra enfocado en los diálogos aporéticos, esto no obsta la referencia a otros diálogos como el *Teeteto* y el *Sofista*, los cuales algunos comentaristas consideran que pertenecen a la “etapa madura” de Platón. Sin embargo, tanto el *Teeteto* como el *Sofista* son en realidad diálogos aporéticos. La conclusión del primero es claramente aporética y el carácter aporético del segundo puede ser deducido de la evidente insatisfacción de Sócrates con lo que el Extranjero de Elea ha logrado (Cf. *Político*, 257b2-4). Consultar el comentario de Francisco J. González a este pasaje (pp. 1997, pp. 43-46). Además, la “cronología de composición” de los diálogos y el “enfoque evolucionista” del pensamiento platónico son suposiciones que tratan de explicar contradicciones en el diálogo. Pero, en mi opinión, no hay contradicción alguna, sino problemas cuyo enfoque depende del contexto y de la persona con quien Sócrates habla (Cf. De Bravo, 2020). En tanto los diálogos no muestran la evolución del autor, sino modos diferentes de enfrentar los problemas por parte de Sócrates, no sólo es legítima la intertextualidad, sino del todo necesaria para una plena comprensión de la filosofía de Sócrates y del proyecto entero de Platón.

respuesta de algun modo lo revelará. Dependiendo de esta identificación, el diálogo será más o menos fructífero. Teeteto, por ejemplo, al querer responder y, a su vez, al permitir ser refutado, se distingue, precisamente, por su disposición a poner en ejecución eso mismo por lo cual se le pregunta, esto es, el conocer. Al identificarse con lo que él mismo afirma y dice junto a Sócrates, Teeteto “llega a ser” su propia posibilidad de conocer, pese a que pueda errar en la respuesta. La pregunta, en ese sentido, no exige una definición proposicional que determine el “es” de lo preguntado. La pregunta exige, más bien, que el interrogado, al intentar definir el “es”, *se posibilite a sí mismo en la respuesta*. Sin embargo, al preguntar Sócrates por el “es” y al fracasar el interlocutor al responder, éste y aquel quedan en ἀπορία, lo cual no es meramente la experiencia de una mera irresolución lógica respecto a algo, sino una suerte de apertura e indecisión por la cual quienes hablan pueden evaluar, discriminar y alcanzar mayor transparencia sobre ellos mismos. Sólo así el diálogo posibilita que el interrogado se identifique con su respuesta y que se vuelva, por lo tanto, responsable de sí mismo.

De acuerdo a la intención de la pregunta y conforme a lo que la pregunta posibilita es necesario ahora despejar otro momento del cuidado dialéctico de Sócrates.

## 5. La farmacología del cuidado dialéctico

Si, como se señala en el *Teeteto* (189e-190a), el pensamiento es una conversación interna del alma consigo misma, entonces el diálogo no sería otra cosa que el despliegue del pensamiento. Ahora, aunque el diálogo socrático lleva a cabo un cuidado de sí mismo, no se puede pasar por alto que el λόγος común y corriente tiene la tendencia a caer en el mal uso y arruinarse, por lo cual el sí mismo inmediatamente se mantiene desfigurado por medio de la δόξα, la oratoria y la erística. Por ello las posibilidades y motivaciones de los interlocutores de Sócrates resultan a veces ambiguas (Teages, Hipócrates, Critón) y, en algunos casos, se encuentran enmascaradas (Hipias, Eutifrón). Tales ejemplos dan testimonio de que el hablar con otro se vuelve para algunos una manera de adular y complacer los prejuicios de la masa (Polo) o bien una mera habilidad refutatoria (Dionisodoro y Eutidemo). El diálogo, entonces, se convierte en una discusión agonal, cuya dirección no se encuentra orientada hacia sí mismo, sino hacia la victoria de la propia posición (*Eutidemo*, 271c-272a). De ahí que, ante la amenaza de la imposibilidad del diálogo, sea necesario entre los interlocutores esclarecer expresamente unas determinadas condiciones para el buen desarrollo de la conversación (Cf. Vigo, 2001, pp. 5-41). De hecho, Sócrates, al advertir en una ocasión que Protágoras, en vez de preguntar y responder recíprocamente, se extendía en largos monólogos, amenaza con dejar la reunión, considerando que tal situación no satisfacía las condiciones mínimas para el diálogo. En efecto, a Sócrates sólo le interesa ponerse a prueba con el otro y poner a prueba la verdad de sí mismo a través de dar y recibir λόγος (*Protágoras*, 348a). Siendo dialógico, este examen mutuo requiere, por lo tanto, un acuerdo (ὁμολογία) entre los interlocutores e implica, en este sentido, la aceptación del justo proceder de la conversación (Cf. *Gorgias*, 487e, 487e, 488a, *Critón*, 49d, 52d, *Eutifrón*, 6a, 10c, *Lisis*, 214d, *Cármides*, 162e, 172e, 175c, etc.).

El diálogo socrático supone, entonces, un justo acuerdo entre las partes acerca de lo que allí y en ese momento se encuentra en discusión. Ahora bien, si uno de los

interlocutores, al aceptar las razones de los acuerdos, no reconoce las consecuencias de su concesión, ya sea porque se resiste a las pruebas dadas o bien porque, al verse en ἀπορία, considera su reputación amenazada, entonces el diálogo conlleva la posibilidad de la refutación (ἔλεγχος),<sup>20</sup> la cual, en el caso de Sócrates, tiene el carácter de un fármaco.<sup>21</sup> Puede entenderse la naturaleza farmacológica de la refutación de acuerdo a las palabras de Sócrates en el *Gorgias* (458a-b),<sup>22</sup> donde el ἔλεγχος es usado para referirse a la liberación de una falsa opinión. Pese a la intención purificadora de Sócrates, la refutación es experimentada en la mayoría de los casos como si fuese un veneno.<sup>23</sup> Sin embargo, este fármaco es del todo necesario, si el interrogado se encuentra de soslayo a sí mismo y dominado por sus propios pareceres.

Sócrates, al preguntar por el “es” de algo y al buscar con el otro su respuesta, exhorta al interrogado a tomar distancia de lo que tiene por verdadero. Se vuelve necesario para el interlocutor, por lo tanto, una puesta entre paréntesis de lo que en cada caso considera bueno y malo. Pero esta puesta entre paréntesis no resulta ser el primer paso del proceso terapéutico, sino, más bien, una situación que si no se mantiene suficientemente abierta durante todo el diálogo puede ocluirse o quedar atrás, como si fuese mero punto de partida. Si, en cambio, la distancia que se abre durante el diálogo deja en suspenso aquello que el interlocutor tiene por verdadero, entonces el interlocutor puede en este proceso reconocer su propio bien o, al menos, barruntarlo. En este sentido, la refutación tendrá como función “purificar” la relación del interrogado con lo que le parece bueno para sí mismo, limpiarla de adherencias injustificadas y, en suma, evaluar lo que quiere. De este modo, el sentido de la refutación dentro del cuidado dialéctico no tiene que ver con una sanción de los contenidos proposicionales de los discursos. Más bien, la naturaleza farmacológica de la refutación tiene que ver con una purificación crítica que expulsa el vicio del alma, como dice el extranjero en el *Sofista* (230b-e).

La refutación propia del cuidado dialéctico, según lo que ya se ha dicho, se basa en una purificación de la relación con aquello que al interlocutor le parece bueno. En este sentido, la eficacia del fármaco dependerá del modo como el interlocutor se encuentre abierto a la pregunta. Intentaré mostrar que la función purificadora del cuidado socrático es provocar en el interlocutor un movimiento deliberativo acerca de lo que él considera bueno para sí mismo. La deliberación, sin embargo, sólo resultará posible si el interlocutor quiere responder a la pregunta de Sócrates.

## 6. El diálogo como consejo

En tanto el diálogo es un cuidado de sí mismo a través del cual quien pregunta y quien responde se presentan como mutuos examinadores, el interlocutor de Sócrates se vuelve del todo relevante. El rol del interlocutor no es de ninguna manera pasivo

<sup>20</sup> Para un análisis del significado del ἔλεγχος ver Scott (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Derrida (1975, pp. 91-261) hace uso del significado del fármaco para considerar la crítica de los textos escritos de acuerdo al famoso pasaje del *Fedro* (274d-275b). El contexto dentro del cual Derrida usa la palabra, por lo tanto, es diferente al mío, aunque es posible pensar que el texto escrito, en vez de ser un veneno para el diálogo, puede ser de ayuda, si la deconstrucción derridiana es capaz de ir más allá del contenido del texto.

<sup>22</sup> Ver también *Sofista* (230b-e).

<sup>23</sup> De ahí la ambigüedad del significado de la palabra griega φάρμακον (Cf. Rinella, 2010, pp. 73.74).



y, a su vez, el rol de Sócrates no radica en dictaminar lo que el interlocutor debería o no hacer. El rol de Sócrates consiste principalmente en preguntar de tal modo que el interrogado se haga *responsable* de lo que diga y que, por lo tanto, *quiera* responder. Este querer es, en este sentido, la clave para comprender la naturaleza de la pregunta terapéutica. ¿En qué sentido la voluntad del interlocutor se encuentra en juego en su respuesta?

Ante todo, es necesario advertir cómo Sócrates entiende la voluntad. En el diálogo *Gorgias* Sócrates ofrece una muy significativa pista. Sócrates le dice lo siguiente a su interlocutor: “Escucha, entonces, Gorgias. Debes saber que yo estoy persuadido (ἐμαυτὸν πείθω) de ser uno de esos que en una discusión con alguien en verdad se encuentra queriendo (βουλόμενος) conocer el asunto sobre el cual se debate” (453a-b). Sócrates se encuentra persuadido de ser alguien que quiere que el asunto en cuestión permanezca lo más transparente posible. Lo que la confesión de Sócrates lleva a pensar es que la voluntad se genera por la capacidad de persuadirse a sí mismo y, por así decir, de obedecerse a sí mismo. Para entender esto es necesario desentrañar ciertas relaciones lingüísticas que permitan enfocar adecuadamente el fenómeno de la voluntad.<sup>24</sup> La palabra griega más cercana a nuestra palabra voluntad resulta tener claras connotaciones dialógicas. La palabra βουλή puede ser entendida como determinación y propiamente significa asamblea, consejo. Esto lleva a considerar la relación que hay entre la voz activa βουλεύω (celebrar consejo) y la voz media βούλομαι (querer) a la luz de la relación entre los correspondientes verbos πείθω (persuadir) y πείθωμαι (ser persuadido, obedecer).<sup>25</sup> En este sentido, parece aceptable pensar que el querer sea análogo al obedecer, si consideramos, a su vez, la persuasión en relación al consejo. Por lo tanto, no parecería errado pensar que querer algo implique la capacidad de escuchar y, en ese sentido, la disposición a obedecer el consejo que se ha tomado. Por lo tanto, no parece errado pensar que “querer” algo implique la capacidad de escuchar y, en ese sentido, la disposición a obedecer. La voluntad, de acuerdo a estas relaciones, no significaría un arbitrario y caprichoso impulso, sino la capacidad para llevar a cabo lo que cada uno se debe a sí mismo. De ahí que en este punto se revele la negatividad del ser humano, su falta esencial, por la cual la voluntad sólo se vuelve auténtica si se alcanza la conciencia del deber propio.

Si este razonamiento resulta admisible, entonces Sócrates busca precisamente que el interlocutor se encuentre dispuesto a evaluar sus propios deseos, incluso al punto de “violentarlo” (*República*, 514c), para que él sea persuadido por el consejo celebrado con el otro sobre su propio bien.<sup>26</sup> Considérese el caso que ocurre cuando un médico aconseja a su paciente a tomar un determinado medicamento. El médico lo obliga a querer lo que necesita para volver a estar sano, lo persuade a hacer lo que debe para recuperarse de su enfermedad o, al menos, intenta persuadirlo. El médico puede persuadir, porque tiene autoridad, porque sabe qué es necesario para la salud

<sup>24</sup> Albrecht Dihle (1982) afirma que hay varias palabras con diversos matices para entender el fenómeno de la “voluntad” según los griegos (pp. 20-47). En los diálogos de Platón los verbos más usados son βούλομαι y ἐθέλω. Dependiendo del contexto ambos verbos significarán tanto la planificación y la reflexión como la disposición y la preparación.

<sup>25</sup> Le debo al profesor José de la Cruz Garrido la consideración de estas relaciones.

<sup>26</sup> No resulta posible extenderme aquí en el problema de la relación entre la voluntad y el bien según los diálogos de Platón, pues para ello haría falta un análisis de la *República* en relación a otros diálogos. Para ello remito a Moss (2006, pp. 503-535) y Barney (2010, pp. 34-64).

del paciente. Si, por otro lado, el médico no pudiese persuadir, no vendría de su incapacidad profesional, sino de su ineficaz retórica. Con todo, ante la autoridad del consejo médico el paciente tiene que obedecer. La diferencia entre el consejo médico y el consejo terapéutico del diálogo, sin embargo, radica en que Sócrates, en sentido estricto, no aconseja, porque no sabe. *Más bien, Sócrates y su interlocutor celebran juntos consejo como consultantes*. En este sentido Sócrates puede decirle a Alcibiades en una ocasión: “Pero nosotros tenemos que celebrar consejo en común (κοινὴ βουλή) en orden a que podamos llegar a ser mejores” (*Alcibiades*, 124b-c).

Sin embargo, en algunos casos este consejo cae en la ruina por la incapacidad del interlocutor para escuchar el λόγος y discriminar bien. Esto sucede cuando el interlocutor es llevado por su obstinación. En el *Gorgias*, por ejemplo, Calicles es conducido por el λόγος de Sócrates de diferentes maneras, pero su falta de sinceridad y su miedo a la multitud que con mirada inquisitiva está presente en la discusión, lo fuerzan a aceptar a regañadientes los argumentos de Sócrates. Al final, sin embargo, su propia disposición lo lleva a no querer responder más a las preguntas de Sócrates (519d). A su vez, quien, al escuchar la pregunta quiere responder, se encuentra dispuesto al mutuo examen de lo que cada uno tiene por verdadero. De este modo, los interlocutores pueden deliberar en conjunto sobre lo que es mejor para sí mismos. La voluntad, en este sentido, se convierte en la marca de la cooperación del diálogo y el diálogo se vuelve, así, un consejo, como si fuese una asamblea donde se decide en conjunto acerca de lo que cada uno quiere y acerca de lo que cada uno debe hacer. De este modo, si el interrogado quiere responder a la pregunta, entonces se encuentra dispuesto a sostener hasta el final la concesión de los acuerdos mutuos, incluso, en perjuicio de sus propias creencias y opiniones. Obligado, así, por la pregunta, el interrogado sería capaz de persuadirse a través de la refutación de sus anteriores convicciones y podría, asimismo, volverse obediente al consejo deliberado en conjunto acerca de sí mismo.

Dentro del diálogo terapéutico el querer exige un componente deliberativo que le aporta un carácter obligante a la voluntad. Sin embargo, cuando un interlocutor se encuentra auto-engañado y de este engaño se alimenta su voluntad, el fármaco socrático funciona como una fuerza que distancia al interlocutor de sus propias creencias. En la mayoría de los casos los interlocutores responden las preguntas de Sócrates y, en principio, se someten a la terapia socrática, pero ellos no pueden hacerse cargo del todo de las consecuencias de sus propias respuestas. Por lo tanto, ellos no están dispuestos a hacerse responsables de sus respuestas y a celebrar el consejo necesario sobre lo que es mejor para sí mismos. Sin embargo, como R. Cushman dice, el propósito de Sócrates sería “despertar del sueño las verdaderas opiniones que cada interrogado ha fingido negar pero en las que realmente cree” (1958, p. 308).

## 7. Conclusión

El fracaso del cuidado dialéctico de Sócrates y, por lo tanto, la frustración del consejo, no proviene tanto de una impotencia de la dialéctica como de la incapacidad de escuchar del interlocutor. Al preguntar Sócrates busca que el interlocutor quiera responder y lo ayuda a que se vuelva responsable de su propia respuesta (*Alcibiades*, 127e). Lo que Sócrates quiere, en último término, es abrir la posibilidad de la

autotransparencia a través de la cooperación dialógica. Esta autotransparencia, sin embargo, no implica la posesión del bien, sino el propio diálogo y el mutuo examen de sí mismo.

En términos generales cabe decir que el cuidado socrático está hecho de la misma materia que la enseñanza socrática. Dicho más precisamente, el cuidado socrático constituye el carácter mismo de la enseñanza de los diálogos platónicos. En efecto, basta considerar el proceso que se lleva a cabo entre el esclavo de Menón y Sócrates (*Menón*, 82b-85b) para advertir que la educación consiste ante todo en la destrucción o disolución crítica de aquellos pasos dados, casi inercialmente, por mor de la reconstrucción de lo planteado, en el caso del *Menón*, el doble del cuadrado. Esta destrucción de las creencias, de los pareceres inerciales para aprender dialécticamente algo es análoga al proceso según el cual el interlocutor se cuida a sí mismo mediante el cuidado (farmacológico) del otro. Tal como uno no puede cuidarse a sí mismo sin el otro, así resulta necesario el otro para aprender por uno mismo. Bajo la auténtica cooperación dialógica de los interlocutores Sócrates puede realizar su especial terapia, esto es, el ejercicio político fundamental por medio del cual la voluntad delibera a través del mutuo examen qué es lo mejor para sí mismo (*Alcibiades*, 124e).

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## De la inutilidad a la justificación de una “Forma del dedo” en Platón (De la *República* al *Sofista*)

### From Uselessness to Justification of a “Finger’s Form” in Plato (From *Republic* to *Sophist*)

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RESUMEN: En la *República* (523a), Platón considera innecesaria la existencia de una Forma del dedo, pues no puede imaginarse un no-dedo, mientras que en el Libro X afirma la existencia de una Forma de la cama, un objeto sustancial como el dedo. Esta imprecisión platónica respecto de las Formas de sustancias se confirma en el *Parménides*, cuando Sócrates confiesa dudar al respecto. Este artículo encuentra en un diálogo posterior, el *Sofista*, una respuesta coherente. La Forma de lo Otro justifica que, respecto de un dedo, haya su contrario, un “no-dedo”, que es simplemente algo diferente del dedo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Platón, Forma, *Parménides*, *República*, *Sofista*.

ABSTRACT: While in *Republic* (523a) Plato considers there is no need of the existence of a Finger’s Form, since a no-finger can be imagined, in Book X he affirms the existence of a Bed’s Form, a substantial object such as the finger. This Platonic inaccuracy related to the Form of substances is confirmed in the *Parmenides*, when Socrates confesses his doubts about them. But in the *Sophist*, a later dialogue, we find a coherent response because The Form of the Other justifies that there be an opposite to the finger, a “no-finger”, which is simply something different from the finger.

KEYWORDS: Plato, Form, *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Sophist*.

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Quizá la inagotable riqueza de la filosofía de Platón se deba a que nunca escribió un tratado para explicar su concepción de la realidad, y como por

entonces no existían las enciclopedias, los diccionarios filosóficos y menos aun los reportajes (escritos u orales), quien se interese en su pensamiento debe forzosamente imaginar que dialoga con el filósofo, que se coloca en el lugar de alguno de los interlocutores de Sócrates, si bien sabe que no obtendrá respuesta alguna. El mismo Platón escribió que “los textos son como las pinturas: no responden a quien las interroga”.<sup>1</sup> Pero el hecho de haber escrito “diálogos” y no tratados, nos permite seguir, como en un documental, el intercambio de ideas, del cual surge a veces un producto que los historiadores de la filosofía resumen en la frase “Platón dice que...”.

En este breve trabajo hemos decidido privilegiar un caso atípico que se encuentra en un diálogo también atípico, en el cual no se puede encontrar la frase precedente, simplemente porque Platón dice que... “no sabe qué decir”. El diálogo es el *Parménides* y el pasaje en cuestión es la línea 130c3, en la cual Sócrates joven (que no es otro que Platón, hasta el momento previo a la escritura del *Parménides*) confiesa que, en ese caso —que ya veremos, se encuentra en un camino sin salida, en “una dificultad (ἐν ἀπορίᾳ)”.

Nuestra interpretación de la frase citada supone un *parti pris* —o, si se quiere, un prejuicio— que preferimos exponer antes de analizarla. Cuando la Academia tiene casi veinte años de existencia,<sup>2</sup> Platón, que acaba de regresar de una estadía bastante azarosa en Sicilia, escribe el diálogo que acabamos de calificar de “atípico”, el *Parménides*. Por razones que ignoramos, Platón expone en dicho diálogo, de manera esquemática pero fiel a cuanto siempre dijo, su concepción de la realidad, en especial el papel que juegan las realidades en sí, que él llama “Formas”. Pero el diálogo es atípico porque, contrariamente a lo que ocurre en otras ocasiones, Sócrates, portavoz de Platón, es incapaz de responder a las objeciones y a las críticas formuladas por su interlocutor. El caso es curioso porque Platón es el autor, al mismo tiempo, tanto de la presentación canónica de sus ideas, como de las críticas formuladas por un extranjero de Elea, el venerable Parménides, en una reunión que tiene lugar en Atenas. Dado este desdoblamiento, podemos decir que asistimos a un diálogo de Platón consigo mismo: el Platón previo al *Parménides*, representado por un Sócrates rejuvenecido (Platón I), y el Platón “actual”, personificado por Parménides (Platón II).

Ahora bien, ¿por qué razón —comentarios de alumnos competentes, críticas de colegas, etc.— Platón decidió, pasados los sesenta años,<sup>3</sup> someterse a ese ejercicio de autocritica? Nunca lo sabremos. Sea como fuere, y sin

<sup>1</sup> Pl., *Phdr.*, 275d. Todas las traducciones son del autor.

<sup>2</sup> Platón tendría poco más de sesenta años. L. Brisson sostiene que, sin duda, el diálogo fue escrito con posterioridad al año de 370 (1992, p. 14). Diógenes Laercio (III.7) y otras fuentes biográficas sostienen que la fundación de la Academia se llevó a cabo cuando Platón regresó de un viaje a Oriente, fecha que se ubica alrededor de 387.

<sup>3</sup> Ver nota 2.

caer en la filosofía-ficción, no caben dudas —ésta es nuestra interpretación— de que, si Platón no dudó en exhibir por escrito en el *Parménides* algunos puntos débiles e incluso ciertos errores que encontró en su propia filosofía, es *porque ya tenía preparadas las respuestas pertinentes*, que serían presentadas en un diálogo quizá todavía no escrito, pero sin duda elaborado hasta en sus mínimos detalles: el *Sofista*. En efecto, en este diálogo, otro extranjero de Elea, nuevo y esporádico portavoz de Platón, expondrá, ante un Sócrates esta vez silencioso, una ontología renovada que corregirá *todos* los problemas y responderá a *todas* las dudas expresadas en el *Parménides*.

En otros trabajos nos hemos ocupado en forma detallada de esta suerte de re-fundación de su filosofía llevada a cabo por Platón en el *Sofista*, excepto de un punto —fundamental, por otra parte—, del cual nos ocuparemos en este artículo. Este punto merecía un tratamiento especial, ya que la manera en que Platón lo encara es diferente del enfoque utilizado para poner en evidencia otras cuestiones oscuras o contradictorias que el personaje Parménides (Platón II) detectó en la filosofía de Sócrates joven (Platón I). En todos estos casos (por ejemplo, las aporías a las que conduce la noción de participación —la Forma ¿tiene partes?—, los intermediarios entre lo sensible y lo inteligible —esbozo del “tercer hombre”—, la asimilación de las Formas a “pensamientos”, etc.), el cuestionamiento del personaje Parménides se refiere a aspectos de su filosofía para los cuales el personaje Sócrates, aunque joven, tenía *ya* una respuesta clara y distinta (tal como se encuentra en los diálogos precedentes; Platón no hace sino repetir lo que siempre dijo, por boca de Sócrates), y que ahora le resulta imposible de defender.

El caso pendiente que nos ocupa es diferente, porque Platón admite que, respecto de dicha cuestión (de la que hablaremos en detalle más abajo) no sabe qué decir; se encuentra “ἐν ἀπορίᾳ”. Parménides (Platón II) entonces se permite aconsejarlo, pero Sócrates (Platón I) no responde. La respuesta de Sócrates se encontrará en el *Sofista*, y, una vez más, en boca de un extranjero, también proveniente de Elea. Veamos ahora el contexto y la índole del problema para el cual Sócrates (Platón I) no encontró aún la solución. Se trata de un punto que concierne a la “población” del universo de las Formas; en otras palabras, se trata de responder a la cuestión: “¿De qué hay Formas?”. Como es sabido, en la ficción narrada en el *Parménides*, Sócrates joven se vanagloria de resolver el problema de la coexistencia de los opuestos en el ámbito sensible gracias a su propia teoría, según la cual hay Formas en sí que son objeto de participación por parte de las cosas sensibles individuales, y nada impide entonces que algo individual participe de dos Formas opuestas a la vez, como él mismo, que es a la vez uno y múltiple.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 129b-c.

Es esta certeza y, especialmente el carácter dogmático con que Sócrates (Platón I) la presenta, que invita a Parménides (Platón II) a preguntarle si él mismo lleva cabo esa distinción,<sup>5</sup> afirmando que hay una Forma de la semejanza, de la desemejanza, de lo uno, de lo múltiple, de lo justo, de lo bello, de lo bueno. Evidentemente, la respuesta de Sócrates es afirmativa. Pero Parménides insiste y le sugiere nuevos ejemplos: “¿Tú propones también una cierta Forma en sí del hombre, del fuego y del agua?”<sup>6</sup> La respuesta de Sócrates es el objeto de nuestro trabajo: “Respecto de esas [cosas] (περὶ αὐτῶν), me encuentro a menudo (πολλάκις) en una dificultad (ἐν ἀπορίᾳ γέγονα).<sup>7</sup> ¿Es necesario decir lo mismo que sobre aquéllas, o algo diferente?”. Volveremos sobre esta respuesta dubitativa. Por el momento, retomemos el cuestionamiento de Parménides (Platón II), que, sin dudas, quiere poner a prueba la coherencia (o no) de la filosofía de Sócrates (Platón I): “Y respecto de esas cosas que a algunos les parecen ridículas, como el pelo, el barro y la basura, y otras por el estilo, sin valor e inferiores, ¿te ves [también] en la dificultad (ἀπορεῖς) de decir que es necesario que haya o no también de cada una de ellas una Forma separada, distinta de [los objetos] que están al alcance de la mano<sup>8</sup> (μεταχειριζόμεθα)?”<sup>9</sup>

Ante estos ejemplos, la respuesta de Sócrates ya no es dubitativa, pues responde con un rotundo “οὐδαμῶς”, “en modo alguno”, y agrega que estaría fuera de lugar (ἄτοπον) pensar que hay una cierta Forma de esas cosas. Y la reflexión de Sócrates joven continúa: “No obstante, mucho me pregunté si no habría que decir lo mismo respecto de todas las cosas. Pero, apenas consideré esta posibilidad, me alejé rápidamente de ese punto de vista, por temor a caer en el abismo de la charlatanería (φλυαρία). Es así como regresé a mi refugio y considero que sólo hay Formas de las cosas que ya admitimos, y a ellas consagro mis esfuerzos”.<sup>10</sup>

La reacción de Parménides a esta confesión da qué pensar, y es extraño que los trabajos consagrados al *Parménides* no se hayan detenido a estudiar esta respuesta, pues Parménides (Platón II) critica, y con severidad, esta prudencia socrática. Si Sócrates (Platón I) desdeña (el contexto nos permitiría traducir “desdeñaba”) estas cosas despreciables, dice Parménides (el Platón actual) es porque aún no quedó atrapado en las redes de la filosofía. Eso significa que es todavía víctima de las “opiniones de los mortales” (δόξα ἀνθρώπων),<sup>11</sup> evidentísima alusión del Platón adulto al error propio del Platón joven, cuando

<sup>5</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130b.

<sup>6</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130c.

<sup>7</sup> Cornford 1939, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Es decir, de las realidades sensibles.

<sup>9</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130c5-d2.

<sup>10</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130d3-9.

<sup>11</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130e4.

aún se encontraba en el camino erróneo descrito en el *Poema* de Parménides, la vía de las opiniones, y admitía tanto al ser como al no-ser.<sup>12</sup>

Retomemos nuestro pasaje. Es probable que el rotundo “οὐδαμῶς” de Sócrates se deba al carácter quizá “ridículo” o “inferior”, digamos, de esos tres objetos. Pero ocurre que, si es así, el reproche de Parménides respecto de la incoherencia de Sócrates se justifica. En efecto, si Sócrates hubiese sido coherente con sus propias ideas, habría visto que entre las Formas que aceptó en las réplicas anteriores estaba la de lo Bello, y que como él mismo opuso en sus ejemplos cada Forma a su contraria (desemejanza a semejanza, multiplicidad a unidad), forzosamente debería admitir una forma de lo feo, tan inferior como el barro o la basura.

Pero esto no es lo importante. La clave de la reticencia de Platón I a admitir la existencia de Formas del hombre, del fuego, del agua, y también, con el mismo *status ontológico*, del pelo, del barro y de la basura, se debe a que en todos esos casos se trata de *sustancias*, de entidades sustantivas, no de cualidades, estados o propiedades, y, como se deduce de los ejemplos, de objetos *sensibles*, susceptibles de estar al alcance de la mano, ya sean “dignos”, como el hombre, o “despreciables”, como la basura.

La duda de Platón expresada por boca de Sócrates en el *Parménides* se comprende en función del papel que la Forma debe jugar en la explicación de la realidad concreta. Al comienzo de este trabajo hablamos del silencio de los diálogos, en caso de que quisiéramos interrogarlos, pero en lo que concierne a las Formas incluso el *status* de las mismas escapa a toda interrogación; en ese caso, el silencio sería casi total, ya que muy raramente (en sólo dos o tres ocasiones) Platón describe (dudamos en escribir “define”) sus Realidades-en sí, y el rol que las mismas cumplen.

Pero la Forma en cuestión justifica no solamente la posibilidad de conocer la presencia real de ciertas cualidades en ciertos sujetos, sino también la realidad de las mismas, su existencia. La función de la Forma del Bien consiste en otorgar a las otras Formas no sólo su esencia (οὐσία),<sup>13</sup> sino también su existencia (τὸ εἶναι), y las Formas las transmiten a lo que de ellas participa (por ejemplo, la Forma de lo piadoso, la piedad). La función existencial de la Forma se aplica a la propiedad tal como el sujeto la recibe, pero no a su propia existencia. La Forma de lo Bello justifica la existencia de la belleza en María, pero no la existencia de María.

Detrás de este conocido esquema general —que nos vimos obligados a presentar por razones metodológicas; el lector eventual de estas líneas sabrá

<sup>12</sup> Recuérdese que en un pasaje de la *República* —diálogo del cual nos ocuparemos más adelante— Platón dijo que “lo que llamamos opinión (δόξα) [...] participa a la vez del ser y del no-ser”. Pl., *R.*, 478d11-e2.

<sup>13</sup> Pl., *R.*, 509b; en *Sph.*, 257a9 se hablará de φύσις.



perdonarnos — se esconden varias incógnitas; entre ellas, la que nos indujo a escribir este trabajo. Todo filósofo pretende que las conclusiones a las que llegó no admitan excepciones;<sup>14</sup> ellas deben ser válidas para *todo*, incluso para aquellos temas que parecerían quedar fuera de la teoría general. Cuando el Sócrates joven (Platón I) del *Parménides* se encuentra en un callejón sin salida, el venerable Parménides (Platón II) le aconseja que aproveche su juventud para entrenarse en ese tipo de ejercicio que muchos llaman “sutilezas” (ἀδολεσχία).<sup>15</sup>

En efecto, si su teoría pretendió tener carácter universal, Sócrates no debió temer en recurrir a “sutilezas” tales como la de encontrar también una Forma como garantía para los ejemplos que Parménides le propuso... pero Sócrates dudó y, al no saber si también en ese caso hubiese sido pertinente hablar de Formas, se volvió a instalar en la comodidad de su refugio.

La duda se justificaba porque, con anterioridad al *Parménides* y en un mismo diálogo, Platón había negado, en un pasaje, que existiera la Forma de una realidad sustancial (ya veremos cuál) y, en otro pasaje, siempre del mismo diálogo, había ofrecido un ejemplo contrario. Es verdad que el contexto de ambos pasajes es diferente, pero el *status* ontológico de los dos objetos en cuestión es el mismo. Veamos el primer caso.

El contexto del pasaje de la *República* al que hicimos alusión se refiere al conocimiento.<sup>16</sup> Poco después de la alegoría de la caverna, Platón hace una lista de los conocimientos que debe poseer quien va a dirigir la ciudad, y, como resumen, dice que todos ellos deben conducir al ejercicio pleno de la νόησις, que es la visión directa de las Formas. Pero Platón aclara que, en general, la νόησις no es usada correctamente. ¿Por qué? Porque a veces se la despilfarra, aplicándola a cosas que no la necesitan, ya que para juzgar (κρίνειν; Platón evita el verbo “conocer”) ciertas cosas la percepción es suficiente. Es entonces cuando entramos de lleno en nuestro tema: “Las cosas que no necesitan recurrir (παρακαλέω) a la νόησις son aquéllas que no son susceptibles de originar al mismo tiempo una sensación contraria”.<sup>17</sup>

Es verdad que los términos εἶδος, ἰδέα y fórmulas habituales para aludir a las Formas están ausentes de este pasaje. Pero todo el contexto gira en torno a la νόησις, y en pasajes precedentes, en especial en la imagen de la línea dividida, la νόησις es la actividad de la parte superior del alma, del νοῦς, que contempla las Formas. O sea que, aunque el término “Forma” no aparezca, Platón da a entender elípticamente que sólo hay Formas de aquello que admite una “sensación contraria”.

<sup>14</sup> Platón expone claramente dichas conclusiones en uno de los raros pasajes en que habla “sobre” las Formas en *Phd.*, 99d-100a.

<sup>15</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 135d.

<sup>16</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523a.

<sup>17</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523b9.

Este breve pasaje resume la función que la Forma ocupa en los casos concretos que se encuentran desperdigados en los diálogos. Como siempre se trató de saber, gracias al conocimiento de la Forma, si un “x” posee determinada cualidad,<sup>18</sup> en el caso de que no la poseyera, “x” participaría de la negación de la cualidad (en nuestro ejemplo, de la desigualdad). No hay un término medio porque el “no” es sinónimo de lo contrario. En el universo de la cantidad, por ejemplo, algo es uno o no-uno, o sea, múltiple; en el de las matemáticas, un número es par o no, o sea, impar; en el ámbito del tamaño, algo es grande o no-grande, o sea, pequeño (recién en el *Sofista* que, como sostenemos, resolverá los problemas pendientes en Platón I, se encontrará la solución). Pero ocurre que sólo las propiedades, las cualidades, los atributos, los accidentes, los estados, son susceptibles de admitir un contrario. *No es el caso de las sustancias*.

El ejemplo que Platón propone es el de un dedo, y su respuesta es clara y distinta: “La ψυχή de la mayoría no se ve obligada a recurrir a la νόσις [es decir, a la captación de una Forma] para saber qué es un dedo (τί ποτ’ ἐστὶ δάκτυλος)”. ¿Por qué? “Porque nunca la vista le mostró que un dedo sea *lo contrario* (τοῦναντίον) de un dedo”.<sup>19</sup> No hay un no-dedo. En cambio, si se trata de saber si un dedo es grande o pequeño, en ese caso sí que hace falta ἐπισκοπεῖν,<sup>20</sup> es decir, hay que investigar, porque, antes de pronunciarse, el alma debe preguntarse qué es lo grande, qué es lo pequeño. Platón no dice nada más, pero otros contextos nos muestran que se tratará de saber si lo grande, o lo pequeño, que son Formas, están presentes en el dedo.

Parecería entonces que, respecto del conocimiento de una sustancia, no se aplica el mismo procedimiento que se utiliza para conocer sus propiedades o su estado. Las Formas justificarían la existencia real de *las propiedades* de la sustancia (en la presente ocasión, la grandeza o pequeñez del dedo), lo cual permite conocerlas objetivamente, científicamente. Pero no justifican la existencia de la sustancia, es decir, del dedo. Si se quiere saber qué es un dedo, basta con mirarlo. No hay una Forma del dedo, porque no hace falta.

Pero ocurre que en el mismo diálogo Platón dirá, más adelante, de manera clara y distinta, que hay Formas por lo menos de dos entidades sustanciales, como había sido el caso del dedo, y se explayará respecto de una de ellas. En este caso no hay referencias al conocimiento; es el aspecto ontológico de la Forma el que está en juego, pero no para conocerla, sino en tanto modelo de imágenes y de imitaciones que, si no existiera la Forma, no se existirían. Si hay imitación, es porque hay un modelo a imitar, y a ese modelo Platón lo llama concretamente Forma, Idea: “Hay muchas camas y muchas mesas

<sup>18</sup> Por ejemplo, la igualdad en el caso de dos trozos de madera, en Pl., *Phd.*, 74d.

<sup>19</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523d6.

<sup>20</sup> Pl., *R.*, 524b4.

[...] pero, respecto de ellas, no hay dos Ideas (ιδέαι), sino una [Idea] de la cama y una [Idea] de la mesa”.<sup>21</sup> En los párrafos siguientes Platón privilegia el ejemplo de la cama, y la terminología que utiliza es la habitual cuando se trata de las Formas: el carpintero fabrica una cama material contemplando (βλέπων) la Idea (ιδέα) de la cama. Y poco después Platón se vale del término Forma (εἶδος) y dice que ella es “lo que decimos que es la cama” (ὃ ἔστι κλίνη),<sup>22</sup> fórmula ésta que retoma el “eso que es” (τὸ “ὃ ἔστι”) del *Fedón*.<sup>23</sup> Las imitaciones copian “la cama por naturaleza (φύσει)”, que es la obra del dios, que es “lo que es la cama”.<sup>24</sup> De una realidad sustancial, el dedo, no hay Forma; de otra realidad sustancial, la cama, la hay, incluso si, evidentemente, no hay una no-cama. La duda de Platón I en el *Parménides* respecto de la existencia eventual de Formas “sustanciales” se justifica.

Pero el caso de la *República* no es único. En el *Menón*, a propósito de las perfecciones, se las compara con las abejas que, si bien son todas distintas, tienen algo en común, la Forma (εἶδος),<sup>25</sup> lo cual no sería pertinente si se aplica la receta de la *República*, pues no hay una no-abeja. Y otro tanto ocurre en el *Crátilo* respecto de la lanzadera que el artesano fabrica contemplando (βλέπων) “la lanzadera en sí” (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς).<sup>26</sup>

En todos los casos se trata de “sustancias”. El hecho de que la cama y la lanzadera sean *artefacta* no introduce ningún cambio de perspectiva: son objetos sustanciales fabricados. Ni la abeja ni la cama ni la lanzadera son propiedades o cualidades o estados que admitirían la posibilidad de que hubiese las no-sustancias respectivas, lo cual obligaría a poner en juego la νόησις para saber si “eso”, por ejemplo, es una abeja o una no-abeja. O hay una abeja, o no hay nada. También en ese caso basta con mirarla... de lejos, es mejor. Entonces, ¿por qué Platón niega la existencia de una Forma como garantía del dedo, cuando la admite respecto de la abeja, la cama, y la lanzadera? Repito lo dicho: el hecho de que unos ejemplos se refieran a artefactos (cama, lanzadera) y otros a seres “naturales” (dedo, abeja), no cambia nada, porque Platón dice claramente en el Libro X que la cama en sí la creó el dios; recién la segunda cama será un artefacto. No hay Forma del dedo, por un lado; hay Forma de la abeja y de la lanzadera, por el otro. Sin caer en un parricidio, no caben dudas de que se puede afirmar que Platón es inconsecuente.

Pero si bien el diagnóstico es severo, ocurre que, como vimos, es el mismo Platón quien lo comparte en la frase dubitativa del *Parménides*. Ya

<sup>21</sup> Pl., *R.*, 596a-b.

<sup>22</sup> Pl., *R.*, 597a.

<sup>23</sup> Pl., *Phd.*, 75d2.

<sup>24</sup> Platón repite la fórmula ὃ ἔστι κλίνη; *R.*, 597c3.

<sup>25</sup> Pl., *Men.*, 72d.

<sup>26</sup> Pl., *Cra.*, 389b.

veremos que la solución llegará con el *Sofista*, pero, antes de escribir este diálogo, o sea, en las etapas previas también al *Parménides*, ¿intentó Platón superar la anomalía que consistía, dentro de su teoría, en negar el derecho a poseer una Forma como garantía a las realidades sustanciales? Sin correr el riesgo de caer en la filosofía-ficción, creemos que sí. Las sustancias no son susceptibles de ser predicados, pero para que la teoría pueda universalizarse y, especialmente, para que las nociones de participación y de presencia tengan siempre vigencia, las Formas deben ser forzosamente predicados. *Ergo*, ¿habría la posibilidad de *transformar las sustancias en cualidades*, o sea, en predicados?

La lengua provee ya casos de sustantivos con valor cualitativo que conservan en su raíz el sustantivo de origen: humanidad (hombre), animalidad (animal), triangularidad (triángulo), esfericidad (esfera), potencialidad (potencia), fogosidad (fuego), etc. Una lengua dúctil como la griega permite crear términos semejantes. Un pasaje del *Teeteto* es sumamente ilustrativo.<sup>27</sup> Platón habla de la manera en que una cosa individual adquiere una cualidad, por ejemplo, el calor, o la blancura. En realidad, como se trata de propiedades, habría que traducir literalmente que lo individual adquiere la “calurosidad” (θερμότης), y la “blanquidad” (λευκότης). Y a continuación agrega que eso no significa que lo calificado, sea lo que fuere, devenga la “cualidad” (ποιότης), es decir, la Forma de la que participa. Claramente la Forma está presentada como una cualidad en sí. En el contexto del diálogo, Teeteto parece no entender la palabra ποιότης, lo cual es lógico, ya que Sócrates acaba de inventarla. Todos los diccionarios etimológicos están de acuerdo, fundamentalmente Chantraine.<sup>28</sup> Por esta razón Sócrates le dice: “Posiblemente la palabra ποιότης te resulte extraña, y no la entiendas cuando la uso en general (ἄθροον)”. ¿Por qué “en general”? Porque Sócrates siempre habló de “cualidades” ya individualizadas (la blanquidad, la calurosidad), y nunca de la cualidad en sí.

En esta etapa de su producción, ¿pensó Platón, además de crear la palabra ποιότης, en imaginar neologismos que permitirían referirse a las sustancias con el significado de propiedades o atributos? Evidentemente, no quedan testimonios en los diálogos, pero sí en la tradición oral. Es sabido que el enemigo íntimo de Platón, Antístenes, habría escrito en un pasaje de su diálogo *Sathon*, transmitido por numerosas fuentes,<sup>29</sup> que él ve un caballo, pero no la equinidad (ἰπρότης).<sup>30</sup> Uno de los testimonios de la frase acompaña esta observación con una conclusión que obviamente no

<sup>27</sup> Pl., *ε3Tht.*, 182a.

<sup>28</sup> Chantraine 1974, III, p. 921.

<sup>29</sup> Entre otras, Simp., *in Cat.*, 8b25.

<sup>30</sup> Sobre Antístenes, ver Giannatoni, G. (vol. 2, *passim*) y Mársico, C. (vol 2, *passim*).

puede pertenecer a Antístenes, en la cual Platón habría respondido: “No ves la equinidad porque no tienes los ojos para verla”. Es decir que, a pesar de la crítica a Antístenes, Platón habría admitido que la palabra “equinidad” era pertinente. Si aplicamos este neologismo al uso canónico de la teoría, un caballo sería un caballo porque participaría de la equinidad, y para saber qué es un caballo hay que conocer qué es la equinidad. Nada que objetar.

Pero hay otros testimonios. En un pasaje de Amonio,<sup>31</sup> se hace decir a Antístenes: “Veo el hombre, pero no veo la ‘hominidad’ (ἀνθρωπότητα)”. Y Diógenes Laercio da cuenta de un diálogo, muy probablemente falso, entre Diógenes el cínico y Platón, pero pertinente para nuestra hipótesis: “Cuando Platón discutía sobre las Formas y mencionaba la mesidad (τραπεζότητα) y la tacidad (κναθότητα), Diógenes le dijo: ‘Por mi parte, Platón, veo una mesa y una tasa, pero no veo para nada la mesidad ni la tacidad’”.<sup>32</sup> Y la respuesta de Platón coincide con la que habría dado a Antístenes en el otro testimonio: “Es lógico, dijo, porque posees los ojos que ven una mesa y una tasa, pero no tienes el intelecto (νοῦν) con el que se ve la mesidad y la tacidad”. La referencia al νοῦς, por parte de Platón, confirma que, para él, se trata de Formas “visibles” sólo para el pensamiento.

En realidad, este tipo de terminología habría solucionado varios problemas. Por ejemplo, si Platón hubiese hablado de hominidad y no de hombre, el argumento del tercer hombre hubiese desaparecido. Veamos por qué. En la versión del argumento del tercer hombre tal como la presenta Alejandro de Afrodísias,<sup>33</sup> éste dice que cuando se afirma que “el hombre se pasea” (ἄνθρωπος περιπάτει), éste no puede ser ni la Forma de hombre, ni un individuo, pues no sabemos quién es; hay que imaginar entonces una entidad intermediaria. El argumento se refutaría si por “hombre” se entendiera “hominidad”, y como en la caracterización de ésta figuraría la posibilidad de caminar, todo lo que participaría de ella podría “pasearse”, ya sea Sócrates, o “el hombre”, o “un hombre”.

Dentro de este panorama, una referencia a la dedidad no hubiese parecido extemporánea, y, en el *Parménides*, a la pilosidad, a la barridad, a la basuridad. Felizmente la solución encontrada en el *Sofista* evitó que Platón cayera, por escrito, en estos excesos de lenguaje. Así y todo, si esta posibilidad existió, a ella pudo referirse Platón I cuando confiesa a Platón II que en cierto momento temió caer en el abismo de la charlatanería.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ammon., in *Porph.*, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> D. L., VI, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Alex. Aphr., in *Metaph.*, 83, 34

<sup>34</sup> Pl., *Prm.*, 130d8. Curiosamente, J. L. Borges, si bien no manifestó mucha simpatía por Platón, recurrió a neologismos por el estilo. En *Historia de la eternidad* (1974, 358), dice desconfiar de la existencia de una humanidad eterna, y escribe: “Formas universales mucho más arduas nos propone Platón. Por ejemplo, la Mesidad, o Mesa Inteligible, que está en los cielos,



Antes de tratar la solución que Platón propondrá en el *Sofista*, podemos agregar que, curiosamente, los dos testigos más próximos en el tiempo de la filosofía de Platón, Antístenes, que era su contemporáneo (aunque unos años mayor),<sup>35</sup> y Aristóteles, cuando se refieren a la teoría de las Formas (ambos, para criticarla), presentan el caso de ejemplos que hemos llamado sustanciales. Aristóteles, como es sabido, dice que las Formas de Platón son sustancias (οὐσίαι) en sí. La significación de οὐσία es, evidentemente, diferente en Platón y Aristóteles, pero los pocos ejemplos que éste da, aparte de lo grande y lo pequeño, son la mesa,<sup>36</sup> el animal, el bípedo, y “el hombre en sí” (τὸ αὐτοάνθρωπος).<sup>37</sup> Pareciera que, para sus contemporáneos, las Formas que hemos llamado “sustanciales” eran las que mejor caracterizaban la filosofía de Platón. El caso de Antístenes es más interesante porque también él utiliza la fórmula “en sí” para aludir a las Formas, pero, para él, se trata de “cualidades en sí”.<sup>38</sup> Y cuando ofrece ejemplos, como vimos, recurre al caballo (en el pasaje de su diálogo *Sathon*, ya mencionado) y al hombre (en una referencia de Amonio), o sea, dos entidades sustanciales como la cama, la abeja, la lanzadera... y el dedo.

Dejemos de lado estas elucubraciones —pues no se pueden demostrar— y volvamos a los diálogos, y no caben dudas de que en los escritos que precedieron al *Parménides*, Platón presenta en algunos casos ejemplos de Formas que no responden a su propia decisión de admitirlas. Como vimos, sólo hay Formas en los casos en los que puede existir una no-Forma correspondiente, que es su contraria: bello/no-bello, grande/no-grande, piadoso/no-piadoso, uno/no-uno. Y en los pocos ejemplos concretos que ofrece Aristóteles (para criticarlos), según narran anécdotas o testigos que leyeron las obras de Antístenes, esos ejemplos serían los más importantes. No obstante, como no podemos juzgar a Platón por lo que dicen sus detractores, debemos limitarnos a tomar como punto de partida la duda expresada por Platón I en el *Parménides*, que es una de las incógnitas que quedan sin resolver en ese diálogo, pero que encontrarán su respuesta en el *Sofista*.

Si el *Parménides* es un diálogo extraño, otro tanto puede decirse del *Sofista*, que, si lo es, es porque hereda el carácter insólito de aquél. En efecto: en el *Sofista*, Platón va a solucionar los problemas a los cuales

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arquetipo cuadrúpedo que siguen todos los ebanistas del mundo”. Y después dice que no se hubiese llegado a la mesidad sin la triangularidad. Finalmente, hace una alusión a la leonidad, que es inimaginable sin la melenidad y sin la zarpidad.

<sup>35</sup> Habría nacido entre 445 y 444. Para el nacimiento de Platón se acepta en general los años 428-427.

<sup>36</sup> Arist., *Metaph.*, 988a.

<sup>37</sup> Arist., *Metaph.*, 991a.

<sup>38</sup> Ver Cordero 2001, p. 333.

“Sócrates” no pudo responder en el *Parménides*, y, para un lector u oyente del nuevo diálogo, habría resultado poco convincente que, con el peso de los años, “Sócrates”, hubiese sido ya “atrapado” por la filosofía,<sup>39</sup> lo cual le permitiría proporcionar las respuestas adecuadas. Platón, que siempre encuentra una *mise en scène* apropiada para sus diálogos, recurre a una novedad: cambia su portavoz. Parménides en persona, en la ficción del *Parménides*, se había trasladado a Atenas desde su Elea natal y, a propósito de una conferencia de Zenón a la cual asiste Sócrates joven, lo puso en aprietos formulándole críticas a las que no pudo responder. En el *Sofista*, otro extranjero, también de Elea, ante un Sócrates prácticamente silencioso, esta vez en Atenas, corregirá los defectos que Platón había detectado en su teoría y otorgará un *status* dinámico a las Formas que les otorgará nueva vida.

En lo que concierne a nuestro tema, es evidente que no vamos a encontrar, literalmente, la justificación de la Forma del dedo. Encontraremos, en cambio, una nueva concepción de la relación entre ser y no-ser que puede justificar, ahora sí, la *existencia de una Forma del no-dedo, condición necesaria para que exista una Forma del dedo*. Se tratará, en realidad, de una consecuencia secundaria de la refutación (o de la relativización) de la concepción parmenídea de la oposición contradictoria entre ser y no-ser.

Todo comienza cuando el sofista es definido como un fabricante de imágenes, de ilusiones, *ergo*, de falsedades,<sup>40</sup> lo cual supone que hay realidades que parecen ser, pero que no son. Pero ya Parménides había sostenido que nada hay fuera de la alternativa ser/no-ser. Si esas realidades no son, nada puede decirse de ellas, porque “no hay no ser”,<sup>41</sup> y el sofista, contrariamente al diagnóstico de Platón, no podría fabricar ilusiones y falsedades. Para justificar su definición del sofista Platón decide entonces cuestionar la alternativa parmenídea “o ser, o no-ser”, y después de un largo camino, que parte, extrañamente, de un pragmatismo inhallable en otros diálogos,<sup>42</sup> junto a la Forma de la identidad, que había monopolizado hasta entonces la φύσις de la Forma (que es algo que “existe siempre respecto de lo mismo de la misma manera”, ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχει),<sup>43</sup> agrega la Forma de lo diferente (τὸ ἕτερον).

Pero, jerárquicamente, como más importante que las Formas de Identidad y de Diferencia, Platón postula la existencia de la Forma del Ser (ιδέα

<sup>39</sup> Parménides: “Lo que ocurre, Sócrates, es que tú eres todavía demasiado joven y la filosofía no te ha atrapado aún, como —estoy seguro— te atrapará más adelante”; Pl., *Prm.*, 130e.

<sup>40</sup> Pl., *Sph.*, 236d.

<sup>41</sup> Οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι; Pl., *Prm.*, fr. 2.3b DK.

<sup>42</sup> De hecho, hay imágenes, y entonces “lo que llamamos realmente imagen ¿no existe entonces realmente? [...] Es muy probable que, de una manera muy insólita, una relación entrelace el ser y el no ser” (*Sph.*, 240b-c).

<sup>43</sup> Pl., *Phd.*, 78d.

τοῦ ὄντος),<sup>44</sup> que ocupa el lugar privilegiado de la Forma del Bien en la *República*, pero que sólo confiere existencia a las demás; de su “esencia” se ocupan las otras dos Formas privilegiadas, de las cuales participan todas las otras. Cada Forma es idéntica a sí misma y diferente de todas las otras. Pero, al ser “diferente” de las otras Formas, cada Forma “no es” la otra, sin que de ello se deduzca que no sea en absoluto. La conclusión que Platón extrae de esta comunicación entre las Formas (συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν, que es una de las novedades que introduce o que sistematiza —pues ya había esbozos en diálogos anteriores— el *Sofista*) es la siguiente: “La naturaleza de lo diferente (ἡ θατέρου φύσις), al hacer a cada género<sup>45</sup> algo diferente (ἕτερος) del ser, hace de él un no-ser (οὐκ ὄν)”.<sup>46</sup>

En la cita precedente Platón se vale de la fórmula “οὐκ ὄν”, sinónimo de “μὴ ὄν”, que aparece con más frecuencia, y en uno de los pasajes fundamentales del diálogo detalla el nuevo significado que, a partir del *Sofista*, adquieren dichas expresiones: “No estemos de acuerdo, entonces, cuando se diga que la negación significa lo contrario, y admitamos sólo que el ‘no’ [τὸ μὴ καὶ τὸ οὐ] colocado antes [de un término] hace alusión a alguna de las otras cosas respecto de los nombres que siguen, o, más aún de los hechos respecto de los cuales se colocan los nombres pronunciados después de la negación”.<sup>47</sup> En resumen, “cuando hablamos de lo que no es, no hablamos de algo contrario (ἐναντίον) a lo que es, sino sólo de algo diferente”.

En el pasaje de la *República* que originó este trabajo, el pensamiento (νόησις) se ponía en juego “cuando las cosas percibidas suscitan una sensación contraria, ya que la percepción manifiesta tanto algo, como su contrario (ἐναντίον)”.<sup>48</sup> Pueden prescindir del pensamiento, en cambio las que no suscitan una sensación contraria (ἐναντίαν)». <sup>49</sup> Era el caso del dedo, que nunca se mostró como lo contrario (τοῦ ἐναντίου)<sup>50</sup> de un dedo. Todo el pasaje se basa en la noción de contrariedad (el término ἐναντίον figura cuatro veces en menos de diez líneas), y no hace falta poner en juego el pensamiento para distinguir un dedo de un no-dedo, porque no hay un no-dedo. Pero, según la innovación introducida en el *Sofista*, un no-dedo no es lo contrario (ἐναντίον) de un dedo, sino sólo algo *diferente* de un dedo, que puede suscitar una sensación *diferente* de la del dedo, por ejemplo, la de una

<sup>44</sup> Pl., *Sph.*, 254a.

<sup>45</sup> En todo este pasaje del *Sofista* Platón utiliza indistintamente los términos “género” (γένος) y “Forma” (εἶδος).

<sup>46</sup> Pl., *Sph.*, 256d-e.

<sup>47</sup> Pl., *Sph.*, 257b-c.

<sup>48</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523c2.

<sup>49</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523b6.

<sup>50</sup> Pl., *R.*, 523d6.

mano, a la cual también basta con mirarla, y *saber* así que es *diferente* de un dedo. Y para *saber* que una mano es diferente de un dedo,<sup>51</sup> hay que saber qué es un dedo y qué es una mano, porque ahora se trata de dos realidades sustanciales justificadas cada una por una Forma.

La solución que el Extranjero de Elea (¿nos atrevemos a llamarlo Platón III?) propone en el *Sofista* para superar la disyuntiva de Parménides (“o ser, o lo contrario del ser, o sea, el no-ser”) permite, retroactivamente, justificar la posibilidad de la existencia de una Forma del dedo.

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<sup>51</sup> La identidad y la diferencia se aplican en “regiones”, y por eso ambas justifican la definición de algo. En la “región” del tamaño, por ejemplo, está lo grande y lo no-grande, y en la parte de la diferencia contrapuesta a lo grande, está todo lo “diferente” de lo grande, entre otras cosas, lo igual (*Sph.*, 257b). La “diferencia” no es total; decir que el caballo es diferente de la manzana no significa nada; decir que es diferente de un asno, que está en la región que abarca lo no-caballo, sí.

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# **Palas Atenea: modelo de las guardianas de *La república* de Platón**

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Palas Atenea como diosa tutelar de la Atenas clásica tuvo un lugar destacado en la vida política y litúrgica cotidiana de la democracia y el imperio. Fue un personaje literario y de culto complejo, con caracterización masculina como la de ser guerrera. Por su parte, la propuesta de Sócrates, en *La república* de Platón, de unas guardianas o gobernantes militares de una ciudad justa describe unas mujeres que, por su misma acción política, resultan masculinizadas. Así, mostraremos cómo las guardianas reelaboran el arquetipo de Palas respecto de la reproducción, la sexualidad, el deseo y la desnudez.

*Palabras clave:* Atenea; feminismo; guardianas; Platón; *República*.

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### **Pallas Athena: Model of the Guardians of Plato's *Republic***

As Athens tutelary god, Pallas Athena had a prominent place in the liturgical and political daily life of democracy and of the empire. She had a complex literary and cult individuality with masculine characterizations as being a warrior. On the other hand, in Plato's *Republic*, female guardians or military governess of a just city are described as women that because of their political action result masculinized. We show how female guardians re-elaborate Pallas' archetype regarding reproduction, sexuality, desire, and nudity.

*Keywords:* Athena; feminism; female guardians; Plato; *Republic*.

### **Palas Atena: modelo das guardiãs da *República* de Platão**

Palas Atena, deusa tutelar da Atenas do período Clássico da Grécia Antiga, teve um lugar de destaque na vida política e litúrgica cotidiana tanto na democracia quanto no império. Esta deusa foi uma personagem literária e cultural complexa, que foi caracterizada com papéis tipicamente masculinos, como o de guerreira. Por sua parte, na proposta de Sócrates, em a *República*, de Platão, de guardiãs ou governantes militares de uma cidade justa, ele concebe mulheres que pela sua própria atuação política são masculinizadas. Neste artigo, mostramos como as guardiãs reelaboram o arquétipo de Palas a respeito da reprodução, da sexualidade, do desejo e da nudez.

*Palavras-chave:* Atenea; feminismo; guardiãs; Platão; *República*.

## La comunidad de mujeres

*La república* ha sido una de las obras más conocidas de la extensa producción escrita de Platón, filósofo ateniense, considerado uno de los pilares fundamentales del pensamiento occidental. Es un escrito con la forma que hizo célebre su autor, el diálogo. Su narrador es Sócrates, uno de los que formaron parte de la larga conversación en el Pireo que, según debemos inferir, el texto reproduce.

Este narrador, y personaje principal, ya ha participado en diálogos anteriores de Platón y conserva algunos rasgos de las caracterizaciones que ha adquirido en dichas obras, principalmente, su carácter investigativo. Sin embargo, el Sócrates de *La república* no se identifica totalmente con el de las obras de juventud de Platón, en las que los interlocutores y los lectores terminaban sin poder responder a las preguntas planteadas y al examen que Sócrates les hacía. Ya en textos previos los parlamentos de Sócrates habían empezado a proponer respuestas, a plantear positivamente posiciones y puntos de vista; no resultaban aporéticos.

*La república* fue elaborada en la etapa conocida como la madurez del autor, en la que desarrolla la llamada teoría de las ideas o las formas. Esta teoría, aunque ocupa pocas líneas en las obras, es el rasgo más conocido y citado del pensador. La justicia, y la búsqueda de su comprensión y adquisición, es una de estas ideas o formas paradigmáticas y, por tanto, será un tema articulador del diálogo aquí estudiado. La obra está estructurada en diez libros y cada uno de ellos aborda un aspecto relativo a la justicia. Existe una unidad en cada libro y una relación en la sucesión de los mismos. Nos ocuparemos de la primera parte del libro v (449c-466e) que, en la mitad de la obra, articula las reflexiones de los libros II-IV. Estos libros indagan los principios de la vida social e investigan las partes del alma del individuo. Los libros VI-VII, a su vez, buscan establecer el carácter y perfil del filósofo y la naturaleza de la filosofía en una perspectiva metafísica. En medio de estos extremos, el libro v, de cierta manera, contiene las temáticas que le anteceden y suceden; hace de bisagra entre lo que podríamos llamar un estudio más político y psicológico de la justicia, propio de los libros II-IV, y uno de los fundamentos filosóficos del universo práctico de los libros VI-VII.

La primera parte del libro v prolonga la discusión política del Estado justo y el injusto. Allí se propone un nuevo intento de sociedad ideal (449c-466e):

la comunidad de mujeres y niños, consecuencia del fracaso de un proyecto anterior (372a-e) que solo estipulaba la supervivencia material de los ciudadanos y no otras necesidades humanas. El libro del que nos ocupamos finaliza con la reflexión sobre la naturaleza del filósofo ya que, al indagar por la viabilidad de la equidad de las mujeres, Sócrates declara que la única posibilidad y, aun más, la necesidad de que la ciudad ideal se realice, será que los gobernantes y los filósofos sean las mismas personas (472a-480a). Si los gobernantes llegan a ser filósofos o los filósofos gobernantes (473d-e), entonces se realizará lo que se describe en la extensa primera parte del libro v: la comunidad (*koinonía*) de las mujeres y los niños.

La comunidad de mujeres descrita es pensada y no real. Consiste en la propuesta de la igualdad de varones y mujeres en la clase de los guardianes y responde a la pregunta por una sociedad justa, la mejor que podemos pensar. Este proyecto resulta ser un remedio o cura para los problemas de injusticia de las ciudades históricamente realizadas. La *polis* ideal se divide en tres clases según la asignación de oficios y tareas de sus miembros que, además, están ordenadas jerárquicamente: los que son mejores para ejercer la tarea de pensar y conocer serán los que gobiernen; los que por naturaleza tengan buena disposición para producir objetos y para comercializarlos estarán en la base de la *polis*; y, en la mitad, se ubican los que tienen arrojo y buena disposición en el campo de batalla. De los tres estamentos, los guardianes están conformados por las dos clases más altas: los gobernantes y los auxiliares. Entonces, todo lo que es válido para los guardianes puede no serlo para la tercera clase, de la que *La república* no ilustra cómo vivirían en la ciudad ideal. Los gobernantes y los auxiliares se distinguen en el texto de Platón porque los primeros son más sabios y efectivamente gobiernan, mientras que los auxiliares desempeñan los oficios de los jóvenes militares y obedecen a los primeros. Las responsabilidades de las decisiones del gobierno recaen sobre los gobernantes. Los auxiliares son el contingente militar.

La propuesta de la *koinonía* de mujeres, en el sentido en el que la expone Sócrates, no significa que todas las mujeres estén disponibles sexualmente para todos los varones, como podría entenderse la expresión, sino que para Sócrates se trata de la necesidad de compartir varones y mujeres la totalidad de las labores que deben realizar los gobernantes y auxiliares, tal como sucede con otros animales (466d1). Los guardianes de ambos sexos recibirán

la misma educación física y entrenamiento; compartirán la misma vida en las barracas militares (458c8-9) y tendrán las mismas responsabilidades.

Además de las tareas atléticas y militares, las mujeres guardianas también se ocuparán de tomar decisiones políticas, porque las mejores naturalezas constituirán la clase de los gobernantes y no solo la de los auxiliares.<sup>1</sup> A la *koinonía*, resultado del diseño de una sociedad lo más justa y buena que se puede pensar —aunque para Sócrates tiene varios defectos porque surge de la necesidad del lujo de los hombres—, Halliwell, entre otros, la llama comunismo (9). Los libros II y III han establecido las necesidades de educación y formación de los guardianes. A partir del libro V, todo lo dicho se deberá cumplir también para las mujeres guardianas, pues, según este planteamiento, pueden llegar a los más altos cargos políticos (540c5-6; Halliwell 164). Como los guardianes varones son lo mejor de su generación y deben tener aptitudes excelentes para el desempeño ético, lo propio ocurrirá con las mujeres: serán las mejores las que estén capacitadas para la guerra y el gobierno. Si los guardianes, antes de introducir el tema de las mujeres, no podían tener propiedad privada (416d), y si el oro divino de sus almas se podía corromper con el oro material (416e), en el libro V se aplican las mismas normas para las mujeres. Sin embargo, como ya advertimos, las afirmaciones sobre las guardianas se refieren a la élite de la población y no a todas las mujeres de la *polis*.

La descripción de la comunidad de mujeres de *La república* abarca varias páginas (449c-466e). No hay un pasaje que no sea debatible y no haya sido debatido en los estudios relacionado con este texto. En términos generales, la propuesta es la siguiente: a) varones y mujeres vivirán sin segregaciones, en barracas militares; b) ninguna mujer cohabitará en privado con un varón (457c); c) se determina la supresión del espacio doméstico y del trabajo de la crianza (460b, 460d); d) las mujeres recibirán la misma educación que los varones (456c-d); e) las mujeres se ejercitarán desnudas con los varones en la palestra (457a); f) se prohíbe el conocimiento de la identidad de los hijos y los padres (457c); g) se asigna a los gobernantes la tarea de definir las parejas sexuales temporales con fines eugenésicos (459a-d). Los mejores serán premiados con más asignaciones de parejas o matrimonios sucesivos

1 No estamos de acuerdo con Annas (311) que limita la igualdad a los auxiliares y entiende que los gobernantes son solo varones. Compartimos la perspectiva de Halliwell (164), ya que Platón propone que habrá amantes o amigos de la sabiduría (456a4-5), es decir, filósofos.



(460b). Aunque se reconoce la presencia del deseo (458d2-3; 461b9-c7), los principios de la libertad individual y del placer no son considerados por Sócrates; h) las mujeres llevarán a cabo las mismas tareas que los varones (456b), incluyendo la filosofía (456a).

Toda la propuesta de igualdad entre mujeres y varones tiene una historia de interpretaciones —rastreada con detalle por Natalie Bluestone—, que habla tanto de los prejuicios y razones de los intérpretes como del texto platónico. Esta historia se divide básicamente en intérpretes misóginos y feministas (Halliwell 9). Los primeros niegan, de múltiples maneras, que Platón defienda la justicia de la *koinonía* y que las mujeres tengan igual responsabilidad y educación. Los feministas defienden la tesis de que el autor sí plantea la investigación con seriedad y no solo estaba haciendo reír a la audiencia. Nosotros creemos que en *La república*, aunque es de carácter investigativo y no un tratado, contiene una crítica seria a la asignación de roles sexuales imperante.

El proyecto de Platón se relaciona con la época de producción del texto y con la Atenas clásica donde el autor nació y vivió la mayor parte de su vida (Halliwell 9). Es importante para analizar la *koinonía* no darle la espalda a la perspectiva histórica, ya que las razones para la elaboración de la propuesta —aunque llena de burlas, dudas y objeciones en el propio texto (449c2, 450b1, 450b5, 450b7, 450c7, 450d1, 453d)— no surgen del vacío, sino de unas realidades culturales que no se restringen a lo político factual o especulativo; se gestan, también, en los imaginarios míticos o religiosos de la época.

Una vez establecido el lugar de la primera parte del libro v de *La república* en el conjunto de la obra y la argumentación principal que formula, presentaremos el mito de Palas Atenea que, a nuestro juicio, elabora una noción cercana a las mujeres guerreras y filósofas de la *koinonía* de Platón. ¿De dónde provenía la idea de la comunidad de mujeres tan opuesta a la realidad y las valoraciones políticas de la época? Proponemos que en el arquetipo de la diosa se encuentra una matriz inspiradora del modelo de ciudad justa que contempla la igualdad de los sexos. Lo evidente, si nos tomamos en serio la propuesta, es que el filósofo no estaba conforme con la distinción de roles según los sexos, imperante en su sociedad, ni con el injusto estado de segregación. Esta injusticia no se basaba en alguna comprensión reivindicativa de las mujeres por parte de Platón, sino más

bien puede entenderse como “cada uno en su función” (453b5), idea que se aplica tanto a las partes internas del alma individual como a las partes de la ciudad. Así, las mentes de las mejores mujeres no se diferencian de las de los mejores varones, por lo que deben llevar a cabo las mismas funciones.

Por otra parte, el autor debió enterarse de distintas prácticas políticas de otras sociedades, que halló mejores que lo que veía en su propia ciudad y que, de alguna manera, pudieron ilustrar alguna de las propuestas de su *koinonía* (Halliwell 10), aunque el texto afirma que es lo contrario de lo existente (456a5-6). Halliwell admite que, aparte de las influencias en cuanto a los roles protagónicos de las mujeres en sociedades dorias como Esparta, o en lugares más lejanos como Egipto o el Mar Negro (10), “el pensamiento de Platón sobre las mujeres estaba teñido por potentes imágenes de la mitología de su cultura”<sup>2</sup> (11). Aunque este autor contemporáneo, en su edición del libro v, privilegia la leyenda de las Amazonas como inspiradoras del pasaje de *La república* que estamos considerando, menciona, en primer lugar, a Atenea con el imaginario militar asociado a la diosa (11). En este artículo mostraremos que el imaginario militar de la diosa está relacionado con varias determinaciones de las guardianas, reunidas en el proyecto de la comunidad de mujeres. Para documentarnos sobre Atenea nos valdremos de varias fuentes académicas y antiguas, principalmente del poeta Calímaco que escribió un himno a la diosa en la época helenística.

## El arquetipo de la guerrera

Luego de este resumen sobre las generalidades de *La república*, de establecer el lugar del pasaje estudiado en el contexto de la obra, de enumerar los posibles orígenes del relato platónico de la legislación de los guardianes, expondremos los aspectos que nos interesan en relación con todo ello, sobre la diosa epónima de Atenas. Se trata de un antecedente y fuente de la concepción de las mujeres guardianas así como de la idea de igualdad de mujeres y varones.

En el plano teórico y metodológico, las afirmaciones que siguen están basadas en la concepción que tienen K. G. Jung y otro de los exponentes de la psicología analítica, Erich Neumann, sobre los mitos, el arte, la

2 “Plato’s thinking about women was coloured by potent images of his culture mythology”.

literatura, lo masculino y lo femenino como parte de los contenidos de la mente. Según estos autores, las obras literarias son expresión de un autor particular que se dirige a las imágenes míticas para darles expresión desde su propia experiencia. El artista crea a partir de su vida personal y de un proceso creativo impersonal (Jung 84-105). Los relatos míticos y las obras de arte, a su vez, son expresiones conscientes de contenidos del inconsciente que sirven para conjurar miedos e incertidumbres o para expresar deseos. Metodológicamente la psicología analítica opera comparando los contenidos mitológicos, las obras de arte y, muchas veces, los testimonios de los pacientes psiquiátricos que ayudan a revelar los contenidos del inconsciente colectivo, porque su discurso puede estar más cerca de él.

Ahora bien, Atenea es más antigua que el texto platónico y sus orígenes se remontan a la tradición oral. Sobre su evolución histórica, Arthur Bernard Cook, citado por Guthrie (106-109), dice que Atenea fue originalmente una madre-montaña pregregia del cerro de la Acrópolis de Atenas. La diosa habría tomado su nombre de la ciudad y no esta de aquella. Aunque no se conoce la etimología del nombre, hoy los especialistas coinciden en que no es palabra indoeuropea sino prehelenica, adaptada al griego de las tablillas del lineal B. Según Cook, se trataba de una Gran Madre que existió en los pueblos agrícolas neolíticos como deidad principal. La hipótesis del estudioso infiere que se habría vuelto masculina y guerrera con la llegada de los indoeuropeos a la península balcánica, a principios del segundo milenio. Al convertirse en protectora de la ciudad, adoptó los rasgos militares y perdió los de madre, lo que muestra que la función de guerrera y madre se excluyen en cierto momento de la evolución cultural de la diosa.

La adoración de la serpiente, el búho y el árbol es traza cierta de la religión minoica que pasó a la cultura griega micénica a través de Atenea. La serpiente, que está presente en la iconografía de Atenea en la Época Arcaica y Clásica (figura 1), relaciona a Atenea con las profundidades de la tierra y los misterios de la vida y la muerte. El búho, por su parte, es un símbolo de su sabiduría. El árbol de la Acrópolis, que era su olivo,<sup>3</sup> era emblema de la producción agroindustrial de la *polis* ateniense y estaba presente en el cuidado del cuerpo de los atletas y en la cocina cotidiana. El árbol, las

3 Smardz menciona cómo se concebía el olivo micénico en la Acrópolis (5); el olivo como árbol sagrado (13); Atenea asociada con el olivo (21); Atenea asociada al árbol (22); Atenea diosa de la fuente, el palacio y los reyes (22).

columnas de las edificaciones (la casa) y el altar son una misma expresión de lo femenino. Diosa del pensamiento y la sabiduría, pero también del hilado (figura 2) que elabora la ropa del cuerpo.



*Figura 1.* “Atenea llevando la égida con flecos de serpientes, hidria ática de figuras negras”, (ca. 540 a. C.). Atribuida al pintor Euphiletos. Paris, Bibliothèque National. *Wikipedia*. Web.



*Figura 2.* “Lebe gámico de terracota (cuenco de fondo redondo con manijas y soporte usado para matrimonios)”, (ca. 420 a. C.). Atribuida al pintor Naples. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Web.

Es probable que Cook tenga razón en identificar a Atenea de la Época Clásica con la Gran Madre de los primeros mil años de la Edad de Bronce e, incluso, con la deidad toponímica de la montaña en el neolítico y que haya devenido en la diosa de la guerra con la llegada de belicosos indoeuropeos, antepasados de los micénicos. Sin embargo, la hipótesis histórica no explica cómo se llevó a cabo el proceso de transformación de la diosa prehelénica tal como se consolidó en los siglos V y IV a. C.

Atenea es una figura cultural importante. Protagonista o personaje de muchas de las grandes obras literarias de la tradición helena, ha traspasado las fronteras de la cultura griega y ha alcanzado presencia incluso en nuestra época y ciudad (figura 3). A pesar de la permanencia y familiaridad con que nosotros hoy invocamos a Palas Atenea, los significados que tenemos de ella no son los mismos que los que tenían los griegos. Sin embargo, no sobra aclarar que nos ocuparemos de sus implicaciones en la Antigüedad.



**Figura 3.** Restrepo Acosta, Felipe. “Monumento a Minerva’ de Vico Consorti. Entrada principal, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. Carrera 4, calle 11. Bogotá”. Wikipedía. 14 de abril del 2010. Web.



En la Época Clásica, la diosa patrona de la *polis* ateniense se volvió más destacada, pues creció el poder político de la ciudad en los confines del Egeo. Aunque era venerada en muchos lugares de la Hélade con santuarios y rituales (Deacy, “Famous Athens” 222), en ninguno de ellos tuvo tanta importancia como en el Ática. El olivo que ella había ofrecido a los atenienses se erigía en la misma Acrópolis y testimoniaba el triunfo de la diosa sobre su competidor por la primacía divina de la ciudad: el dios Poseidón (Apollod. 3.14.1). La gente eligió entre dos ofertas divinas: el cultivo de aceitunas que les trajo Atenea y una cascada de sal que ofreció Poseidón. La explotación de los olivares y la exportación de aceite fueron medios de supervivencia insustituibles de los ciudadanos, por lo que se entiende fácilmente la elección de los habitantes del Ática del árbol sobre la fuente (Deacy, *Athena* 79-80).

Acerca de la maternidad, el rasgo más destacado de lo femenino en la Antigüedad, la situación de Atenea no es simple, como se puede inferir de la evolución histórica de una Diosa Madre que devino virgen y guerrera. Aunque la hija de Zeus nunca tuvo marido —en esto es en lo único que rechaza lo viril, como dice en Esquilo (*Eu.* 736-742)—, se le atribuye un hijo de crianza,<sup>4</sup> Erictonio, quien la acompaña en las representaciones iconográficas. El hijo es representado, muchas veces, con cuerpo de serpiente, como lo dice Pausanias (1.24.7).<sup>5</sup> Es el primer rey del Ática, según el mito, nacido de un intento de cópula de Hefesto con Atenea, una vez que ella lo visitó para reparar sus armas. Hefesto,<sup>6</sup> dios de la metalurgia y

4 “Athena, the virgin, thus comes within an ace of being the mother of the ancestral king who enjoys continuing honor in the Erechtheion. The paradox of the identity of virgin and mother is something which the myth recoils from articulating” (Burkert 143). Traducción: “Atenea, la virgen, entonces le faltaba poco para ser la madre del rey ancestral que goza honras permanentes en el Erecteón. La paradoja de la identidad de virgen y madre es algo que el mito teme articular”.

5 “La estatua de Atenea es de pie con manto hasta los pies, y en su pecho tiene insertada la cabeza de la Medusa de marfil; tiene una Nike de aproximadamente cuatro codos y en la mano una lanza; hay un escudo junto a sus pies y cerca de la lanza una serpiente; esta serpiente podría ser Erictonio. En la base de estatua está esculpido el nacimiento de Pandora” (Paus. 1.24.7).

6 Hefesto preside las *technai* como la herrería y la orfebrería, que no son actividades donde lo viril se desarrolle propiamente, aunque no le son externas. Él se ocupa de los metales, Atenea de la lana. Hefesto es objeto de la infidelidad de su esposa Afrodita con el dios de la guerra, lo que sin duda significa una deflación de su masculinidad. Otro rasgo de su virilidad debilitada es su dolencia en los pies: es el dios cojo del Olimpo. Zeitlin dice: “Beyond the universal embarrassment of a cuckolded husband is the singular unattractiveness of this lame and ugly spouse, as Hephaistos himself acknowledges. As

el fuego, entra en pasión amorosa e intenta poseerla. Ella lo rechaza y, en el forcejeo, el semen se derrama en la pierna de la diosa. Esta, disgustada, se limpia con un pedazo de lana (Apollod. 3.14.6) que tira al suelo. Gea,<sup>7</sup> la tierra, acoge y gesta el semen en la lana que ha rozado por la pierna de Atenea. Una vez nacido Erecteo o Erictonio, Gea se lo entrega a la diosa Palas, quien lo cría como su hijo (Deacy, *Athena* 11). En la cerámica, son múltiples las representaciones de la entrega de Erecteo a Palas por parte de Gea (figuras 4 y 5). En ellas se conserva el aspecto más maternal de la diosa Palas, desprovista de armas de guerra. Erecteo es identificado como un rey que había nacido en el Ática, antepasado de todos los atenienses que se consideraban a sí mismos autóctonos. De esta manera, la comunidad política de la ciudad de Atenas es descendiente de la diosa y de ella toman el nombre como ciudadanos: atenienses.

Atenea es una diosa sin madre que ha nacido de la cabeza de su padre Zeus. El padre, a su vez, había engullido a la madre gestante, Metis. Ella nació con la ayuda de Hefesto que raja con un hacha el cráneo de Zeus. Saltó a la vida ataviada para la guerra, con casco, espada o lanza, égida y escudo (figura 6).

Encontramos un paralelismo con las guardianas de Sócrates que también carecerán de madre y tendrán unos hijos que apenas rodarán por sus cuerpos durante la gestación, pero, a diferencia de Palas que delegó a Gea la tarea, ellas deberán completar el embarazo. Estos hijos son fruto de relaciones decretadas por la ley, no voluntarios, y de los que ellas no serán propiamente madres. Atenea cría a Erecteo; las guardianas, en cambio, no criarán los niños, los depositarán en un lugar donde serán atendidos por nodrizas, aunque los irán a amamantar si producen leche (*Rep.* 460c). La lactancia la harán las madres a los bebés que tengan hambre cuando ellas lleguen al sitio de crianza y no al

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a result, he cannot claim a full virility, according to the prevailing epic standards. [...] Manliness is measured by a fine male body and evidence of physical prowess" (35-36). Traducción: "Más allá de la vergüenza universal de un marido cornudo se trata del singular desagrado hacia un esposo cojo y feo, como Hefesto mismo lo reconoce. Como resultado, él no puede reclamar una completa virilidad, según los estándares épicos dominantes. [...] La hombría se mide por un cuerpo masculino apropiado y la evidencia de proezas físicas".

7 La tierra es un elemento asociado a lo femenino, en la psique humana. En los relatos griegos, Gea, como primera madre genealógicamente hablando, encarna la fertilidad indiscriminada que acoge toda simiente, y en su oscuridad porta un carácter monstruoso. Sus hijos portan algo de bestialidad y algo de desmesura.

propio hijo porque su identidad será desconocida. Las guardianas reproducirán sus cuerpos sin un vínculo afectivo con el que será el padre biológico de la criatura (Pl. *Rep.* 457c 10), elegido por los magistrados. Tampoco establecerán relación con el hijo porque procrearán solamente para reproducir el cuerpo de ciudadanos de la *polis*, no para satisfacer un proyecto individual.



**Figura 4.** The Trustees of the British Museum. “Hidra ática de figuras rojas con Gaia, Atenea y Erictonio”, (ca. 470-460 a. C.). *The British Museum*, n. 1837, 0609.54. Web.



**Figura 5.** “Cáliz con Gaia, Atenea y Erictonio”, (ca. 440-430 a. C.). Atribuida al pintor Kodros. Berlín Antikensammlung, inv. n. F2537. *Staaliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz*.



**Figura 6.** “Nacimiento de Atenea. Exalipatro ático (trípode de figuras negras)”, (ca. 570-560 a. C.). *Wikipedia. Web.*

Como el hijo de la diosa virgen, los hijos de las guardianas nacerán de una relación al margen del deseo, ni buscada ni elegida. El personaje de Platón, Sócrates, reelabora y modifica el mito de Atenea que, con sus imágenes y rituales, es una manifestación de un arquetipo femenino complejo que integra a lo femenino la búsqueda de la verdad, propio de lo masculino.

Los mitos, como los sueños, emergen del inconsciente como formas del instinto (Jung 41-49; Neumann 38, 75, 147, 153, 211, 263). Por otra parte, los procesos históricos configuran y afianzan lo real y lo imaginado en la mente, planos que no siempre coinciden. El relato mítico legitima y critica, afirma y niega un estado de cosas; no es unívoco. Por ejemplo, el matrimonio como realidad vivida en las comunidades humanas, vigente en las culturas de diversas épocas y geografías, puede ser fantaseado como inexistente o puede pensarse de forma que no coincide con la sociedad en que se vive.

El mito de Atenea, como el proyecto de Platón de la *koinonía* y las mujeres guerreras, niega el matrimonio. No otorgar la función de esposa a una mujer, a la vez, expresa el deseo y temor inconsciente de anularlo,<sup>8</sup> al imaginar una vida humana con una reproducción y una relación entre los sexos que no requiere ese vínculo. Lo mismo puede decirse respecto de los

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8 Véase la postulación de un mundo mítico ideal, no real: “La vida futura será la repetición de la vida terrenal, salvo que todo el mundo permanecerá joven, se desconocerá la enfermedad y la muerte, y nadie se casará ni será entregado en matrimonio” (Man, citado en Lévi-Strauss 333).

otros arquetipos que forman parte del complejo que distingue lo femenino y lo masculino. Encontramos la doble tensión de afirmar, y la necesidad de trasgredir, los roles reales atribuidos a los sexos, considerándolos simultáneamente positivos y negativos. Los contenidos míticos de la diosa y la propuesta política de Sócrates expresan un estado de cosas a la vez irreal, deseable y temido.

La masculinidad militar de Atenea y su negación de casarse y tener hijos forman parte de un mismo horizonte de comprensión de los sexos. En la determinación arquetípica se asigna el espíritu agonístico y guerrero a lo masculino, y la procreación y el principio de transformación (crianza de niños, elaboración del vestuario) a lo femenino. Sin embargo, los dos aspectos convergen en la diosa epónima del Ática. La diosa no se identifica con lo masculino simplemente. Expresa lo femenino, ya sea en sus cualidades negadas (el matrimonio y el parto), de las cuales existe un relato, ya como afirmación de lo que no es femenino, en un sentido simple (la acción y la guerra), pero puede serlo en un sentido complejo. Esto es posible por la permeabilidad entre lo femenino y lo masculino, por la necesidad intrínseca de devenir lo otro que existe en cada uno, y porque lo otro está en cada uno de ellos. La diferencia sexual es un requisito de la razón, de la consciencia y de la ciudad histórica, pero es necesidad inconsciente transgredir los límites que separan y distinguen, y concebir como fantasía mítica o utopía aquellas realidades de las que no tenemos experiencia, pero podemos pensarlas, desearlas y temerlas.

El proyecto del libro v de *La república* propone una realidad que subvierte los límites del orden histórico. Allí Sócrates expresa una parte no realizada de las imágenes del inconsciente que reconoce la autonomía de un “ser para sí” de lo femenino por oposición al rol histórico de “ser para otro”. El proyecto de las mujeres guardianas no ha sido realizado en las *poleis* conocidas (456c2-3) pero, para Sócrates, ello no significaba su imposibilidad. En la apuesta por la *koinonía* se transforma el orden político real, así como el privado de la ciudad vivida, y se reelabora, con variaciones, un arquetipo femenino no convencional y complejo: el de Palas Atenea.

La asociación de Atenea con la mujer guerrera o guardiana no es explícita en *La república*, pero es reconocida por Platón, en las *Leyes*. Muchos años después de haber escrito *La república* el autor reflexiona sobre la manera más razonable para diseñar una *polis*. El Ateniense, personaje principal del

diálogo, propone, respecto de la educación de los jóvenes, que la instrucción en la música y la gimnasia sea la misma para varones y mujeres, tal como lo había prescrito Sócrates en *La república*. Sin embargo, en relación con el resto de la vida de las mujeres, al contrario de *La república*, en las *Leyes* se propone que no vayan a la guerra, ni lancen flechas de los arcos, ni lleven lanza y escudo como la diosa, refiriéndose a Atenea (Pl. *Lg.* 806a). Estas mujeres, no obstante, seguirán teniendo derecho a la misma educación que los varones.

Recordemos que la diosa nace ya con armas de la cabeza de su padre. Pero, en esta última obra de Platón, *Leyes*, las mujeres se encargan de la casa y de la crianza de los hijos, y no participan de los ejercicios militares. Serán entregadas en matrimonio, como en la ciudad histórica, como en Atenas. El Ateniense de las *Leyes* parece menos osado que el Sócrates de *La república*. Podríamos pensar que Platón, en su última obra, enmendó la osadía del proyecto anterior. Tanto en *La república* como en las *Leyes* se repite la lógica de exclusión de la casa y la guerra, separación tajante entre lo privado y lo comunitario: si las mujeres se ocupan de la casa, no irán a la guerra, y si van a la guerra, no habrá casa, porque no habrá mujeres que se ocupen de ella. Las propuestas de cada obra respecto de la función social femenina son diversas pero la lógica de la contradicción irreconciliable entre gobierno, vida militar, igualdad de las mujeres con los varones, filosofía, por una parte, y matrimonio, casa, crianza de los hijos, por otra, subsiste intacta, aunque los dos proyectos sean divergentes. Postulamos que el carácter irreconciliable de la vida política y militar con el matrimonio y la crianza de los hijos está presente en buena parte del pensamiento griego de la Antigüedad. El carácter de Palas así lo revela. Sin importar el momento en que se haya transformado la Gran Madre montaña en diosa guerrera, lo cierto es que en ese momento la maternidad se suprime en la diosa. La razón de esta tajante separación, desde nuestro punto de vista, está en que se trata de momentos diferentes del desarrollo de la consciencia (Neumann, *The Origins*) y de lo femenino. En la maternidad, los procesos de individuación (de ser uno aparte de los demás) no se han completado; en la etapa guerrera sí.

La igualdad de funciones de gobierno de las mujeres y los varones del proyecto de *La república* impide el matrimonio, en sentido propio. En el relato de Sócrates queda el nombre de la institución, *gamos*, como mecanismo que posibilita la procreación de nuevos guardianes, pero queda anulado



porque sin relación entre los contrayentes, más allá de la que hace exitosa la reproducción, no se preserva el matrimonio. Como consecuencia del hecho de que las guardianas no tengan marido sino un buen semental, se sigue que no padecerán sometimiento, ni circularán ellas mismas como un bien o propiedad.<sup>9</sup>

Algunas especialistas contemporáneas han hecho énfasis en el despojo<sup>10</sup> que, en el nivel de las representaciones mentales, ha sufrido lo femenino por cuenta de relatos como los de Atenea o de las mujeres guardianas, en los que las feminidades se masculinizan y, así, les roban lo mejor de lo femenino y lo pasan al botín de lo masculino. Sócrates, con su mayéutica, es el primer acusado de esta falta.<sup>11</sup> La apropiación que hacen los filósofos se lleva a cabo tomando una parte del simbolismo femenino, sobre todo la concepción y procreación, aspectos centrales y positivos del arquetipo de la madre y, por la vía de devaluar el cuerpo y sobrevaluar el alma, los

9 Contra esta interpretación y a favor de entender el proyecto de Sócrates sobre las mujeres guardianas como propiedad de los varones, véase Pomeroy (33-35).

10 Loraux explica que los varones se han apoderado de todo lo positivo femenino: procreación, creación, poder, y que solo dejan lo negativo femenino a las mujeres: seducción, artificio. “Pero el varón se ha apoderado de lo ‘natural’: quedan tan solo el artificio y la fascinación —es el caso de Atenea, la diosa de cuerpo improbable—, y queda la seducción, este hermoso desastre encarnado por la fascinante Helena” (385-6). Saxonhouse afirma que Platón, al incorporar a las mujeres a la política, les suprime toda función o atracción erótica y que así las hace inferiores. Menosprecia el autor, también, la función reproductiva femenina, y la descripción del proceso filosófico es la de la experiencia sexual de las mujeres, ahí estaría el despojo. DuBois pone de relieve el deseo platónico de apropiarse de la maternidad para el varón filósofo, para incorporar en el retrato del filósofo las metáforas tradicionales usadas para representar lo femenino en la cultura clásica (“The platonic” 141). “This is appropriation of female experience, of the female body” (152) afirma la autora, quien concluye: “The male philosopher becomes the site of metaphorical reproduction, the subject of philosophical generation; the female, stripped of her metaphorical otherness, becomes a defective male, defined by lack” (155). Traducción: “Esto es una apropiación de la experiencia femenina, del cuerpo femenino”, “El hombre filósofo se convierte en el lugar de la reproducción metafórica, el sujeto de la generación filosófica; lo femenino, privado de su otredad metafórica, se convierte en un hombre defectuoso definido por sus carencias”.

11 DuBois (*Sowing*) entiende que Sócrates en *Teeteto*, *Banquete* y *Fedro* despoja los principales valores de generación y reproducción de lo femenino tradicional griego para asignárselos al filósofo varón, luego de devaluar el cuerpo para empoderar el alma. Para DuBois, una vez llevado a cabo este movimiento, lo femenino queda desprovisto de lo poco positivo que le había asignado la tradición anterior y lo masculino retiene el resultado del despojo, en el resto de la tradición filosófica occidental. Aristóteles con su concepción de lo femenino como masculino defectuoso (*pepēromēnon*) (Arist. *GA* 737a25) sería, para la autora, la consecuencia necesaria del raponazo platónico.

atribuye a esta. En el alma, concepción y procreación se presentan como infinitamente superiores a la capacidad femenina de la reproducción del cuerpo, porque los varones no tienen útero.

El libro v de *La república* privilegia, mediante la igualdad de varones y mujeres, la inteligencia y la capacidad de discernir de las mujeres y hace de la maternidad un accidente del cuerpo que deberá superarse lo más pronto posible, para que no deje secuelas afectivas de apego ni en la madre, ni en el hijo (457c). Sócrates pone así a las mujeres, según esta perspectiva del despojo, a amoldarse y asimilarse a la inteligencia masculina, ya que ellas, como guerreras, deberán hacer lo que define a lo masculino, tanto en la realidad como a nivel simbólico: la guerra y la no maternidad. ¡Atención a la disyuntiva entre las opciones excluyentes! Las mujeres guardianas, convertidas en varones, son despojadas de la procreación, más allá del acto biológico del embarazo y el parto, al negárseles la relación con los hijos y lo que simbólicamente significa la maternidad de cuidado y formación de otro ser humano.

La interpretación del despojo ha enriquecido, sin duda, la lectura de los textos, y ha introducido discusiones importantes. Pero esta lectura, aunque no sea equivocada, nos parece insuficiente. La hipótesis del despojo es acertada en el sentido de que en los textos de la literatura que analizan las autoras que hemos mencionado, se encuentra un marcado énfasis en la distinción irreconciliable entre masculino y femenino,<sup>12</sup> por encima de la complementariedad y permeabilidad o mezcla de ambos con momentos de inclusión del contrario, que creemos que es lo acertado. En general, la valoración positiva de lo masculino y negativa de lo femenino es innegable ya desde el relato de la elaboración de Pandora en las dos obras principales de Hesíodo (*Th.* 535-615; *Op.* 45-105) en las que las mujeres conforman un *genos*, una tribu aparte. Coincidimos con Loraux y DuBois en que el valor positivo de la procreación es tomado frecuentemente, sobre todo por Sócrates, para atribuirlo a la filosofía y al filósofo. Es tan prominente la insistencia en la metáfora de la procreación, la preñez, el parto y la asistencia al parto que, incluso, Aristófanes (*Nu.* 135) hace burla de ella cuando Estrepsiades toca en la puerta del *Frontisterio*<sup>13</sup> con tanta fuerza que el joven discípulo

12 Preferir la distinción sobre la indeterminación o la mezcla indistinta es propio de la racionalidad masculina y actividad imprescindible de la consciencia.

13 Se vierte al español *phrontistêrion* (*Nu.* 94) como “pensadero” o “caviladero”. Así es

que abre la puerta se queja de que los golpes le han hecho abortar una idea recién concebida. No se trata de una versión solo de Platón; seguramente Sócrates había hecho ya la apropiación de lo femenino al descubrir la afinidad entre su diálogo y el oficio de la partera Fenarete, su madre. Sin embargo, la hipótesis del despojo se queda corta, si consideramos que lo femenino abarca una realidad que está más allá de lo materno o reproductivo y contiene un momento de lo masculino. En este sentido, lo femenino en lo masculino es una forma de considerar el despojo no como asalto sino como acto legítimo. Si la masculinidad comporta una feminidad que le es propia, entonces el despojo deja de ser tal.

Hemos visto que la maternidad de Atenea es ambigua, en cuanto a la ausencia/presencia de su madre y en cuanto a su defectuoso rol al respecto. El “ser para otro” (madre de, hija de), propio de la maternidad, resulta negado o al menos no realizado plenamente. Otro aspecto, tan importante como la maternidad en la determinación de lo femenino simple o reproductivo, es la belleza. Atenea y las guardianas se rebelarán contra esta asignación y requerimiento que de lo femenino prevalece socialmente. La belleza es un instrumento de seducción<sup>14</sup> que las mujeres, en general, aumentan o realzan a voluntad, cambiando su apariencia, especialmente a través de la cosmética. Si nos atenemos al poeta helenístico Calímaco, en el Himno v a Atenea, *Al baño de Palas*, la diosa rechaza los perfumes, las mezclas, los espejos,<sup>15</sup> lo que podríamos llamar la cosmética. Con ello, rechaza la intención de tomar un baño con el propósito de seducir: quedar linda, perfumada y provocar el deseo de otro, complacerlo. La diosa no necesita el reconocimiento de otro que la desee por lo que podemos inferir que su baño es rito de higiene, salubridad y placer.

Calímaco cuenta que, en el certamen de belleza, del que fue juez Paris, Palas, como participante, se frotó con ungüentos sin mezcla, productos de su propia cosecha, entendiéndose de su olivo. El poeta recomienda traer

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traducido el neologismo que Aristófanes inventa en la comedia que parodia a Sócrates, para designar la casa donde se piensa, *phrontízein*.

14 La belleza es lo que ejerce el poder de atracción sobre el que desea, en la concepción del *Banquete* de Platón y, en general, en la cultura griega.

15 “Ni perfumes, ni alabastros para el baño de Palas / Atenea no gusta de los ungüentos mezclados / y no llevéis tampoco espejo: su rostro es siempre bello”. “μη μύρα λωτροχόοι τῇ Παλλάδι μηδ’ ἀλαβάστρωας / (οὐ γὰρ Ἀθαναία χρίματα μεικτὰ φιλεῖ) / οἴσετε μηδὲ κάτοπτρον· ἀεὶ καλὸν ὄμμα τὸ τίνας” (Call. *Lav. Pall.* 15-17).

solamente “aceite viril” para la ocasión que se está preparando, pues ella, el día del concurso en el Ida, quedó del color de la rosa de la mañana o del grano de granada, después de frotarse el ungüento como lo hacen los jóvenes atletas;<sup>16</sup> el aceite puro es el único producto apropiado para ella. Se refuerza el carácter masculino de Atenea con el símil de los héroes: a ella hay que llevarle el aceite que usan Cástor y Heracles.<sup>17</sup> Pero están presentes las mejillas rojas de muchacha agraciada. A la diosa no le gustan los afeites y perfumes. No obstante, “siempre es de rostro (ojo) bello”,<sup>18</sup> hasta el punto de tener belleza para competir en el divino certamen contra Hera y Afrodita. Afrodita, la diosa ganadora del concurso olímpico, que luego originó la guerra de Troya, es la única, de las tres, que usa el espejo y se arregla dos veces el mismo bucle.<sup>19</sup> Atenea, en lugar de mirarse y arreglarse la cabellera, corrió dos veces sesenta estadios, como un atleta.<sup>20</sup> Nuevamente, el poema refuerza el código masculino de la diosa y su belleza que no es para otro, aunque compita con otras. ¿No alabaría el Sócrates de *La república* la acción de Atenea, que prefiere ejercitar su cuerpo a maquillarlo? Podemos ver en el Himno de Calímaco, de manera implícita, la contraposición del *Gorgias* (465b) de Platón entre la gimnasia, como verdadera *téchnē* (arte), y la cosmética, como un arte espurio. La seductora Afrodita opta por la cosmética: arreglarse dos veces el pelo frente al espejo. Esta parece la opción favorita de las mujeres que buscan la aprobación de los otros. En primer lugar, se trata del momento adulador y “para otro” de lo femenino, siguiendo con el vocabulario del *Gorgias*. Atenea, en cambio, elige la gimnasia, práctica viril, que es beneficiosa para el cuerpo, no seductora. Actúa sobre la realidad de su cuerpo para mejorarlo, no por la apariencia que proyectará en otro.

La interpretación del rechazo de los perfumes y del espejo no se entiende tanto en el sentido de un rechazo a toda feminidad, sino del rechazo de lo

16 “Se frotó expertamente, aplicando a su piel ungüento sin mezclar, productos de su propio árbol”. “ἐμπεράμως ἐτρίψατο λιτὰ βαλοῖσα / χρίματα, τὰς ἰδίας ἔκγονα φυταλιᾶς” (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 25-26)

17 “Con el que Cástor y también Heracles se untan”. “ὦ Κάστωρ, ὦ καὶ χρίεται Ἡρακλῆς” (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 30).

18 “ἀεὶ καλὸν ὄμμα τὸ τήνας” (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 17).

19 “Se miró la gran diosa en el espejo de latón, ni en la diáfana corriente del Simunte”. “οὐτ’ ἐς ὀρεῖχαλκον μεγάλα θεὸς οὔτε Σιμοῦντος / ἔβλεψεν δῖναν ἐς διαφαινομένην” (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 19-20).

20 “Y Palas, después de correr dos veces sesenta diaulos [...]”. “ἂ δὲ, δις ἐξήκοντα διαθρέξασα διαύλω” (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 23).

femenino como objeto, o como “ser para otro”, ser complaciente y adulator, para usar los términos del *Gorgias*. Afrodita, arreglándose dos veces el bucle frente al espejo, en el concurso, actúa como el retórico que no enseña ni dice lo verdadero, sino que busca ganarse el favor del ciudadano receptor. El retórico usa las palabras para despertar los sentimientos que alcanzarán su objetivo seductor; no dirá, necesariamente, la verdad. El “ser para otro” de lo femenino, que se concentra en complacer, en la apariencia (*eídōlon*), proyecta lo que no es como aspecto negativo de lo femenino simple. Por su parte, la procreación y la creación realizan un “ser para otro” positivo, porque crean nuevas realidades, no las aparentan simplemente, sino que se realizan en el otro. El modelo de Atenea corresponde a un momento de lo femenino que no tiene que complacer como objetivo principal y por ello se convierte en “ser para sí”. Ella realiza un “ser para sí” que no es aislado o solitario; lo lleva a cabo en relación con otros y en el cuidado de ellos, mas no como seducción, ni a través de la apariencia. Cuida, guía y acompaña con inteligencia a sus protegidos, pero no los complace, ni los seduce, ni los gratifica. Aconseja y dirige al héroe con sabiduría como una hermana, dice Neumann (*The Origins* 248). El momento del “ser para sí” de lo femenino de la diosa no es diferente de su “ser para otro”; se identifica con la *sophía*, que se deja ver por su propio resplandor, no por voluntad de mostrarse. Una belleza no complaciente ni falaz. Una belleza que es siempre bella, como dice Calímaco.

El himno de Calímaco recalca la proximidad de Atenea con su padre, como si ella fuera el padre. Dice el poeta que aquello que Palas aprueba se cumple, tal como sucede con Zeus. De todas sus hijas, a ella sola Zeus concedió todo lo suyo, sus atributos y poderes (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 132). Atenea es lo femenino del padre, lo otro en que se reconoce la masculinidad de Zeus. Neumann explica la relación de porosidad entre lo masculino y lo femenino de la siguiente manera:

Así como en lo masculino el *ánima* es la hija del espíritu-figura masculino que representa la totalidad, la divinidad masculina; así en lo femenino el *ánimus* es el hijo del espíritu-figura femenino que representa la totalidad, la Sofía, la divinidad femenina. (“La conciencia” 94-95)

Atenea encarna el momento de lo femenino que se desliga de las funciones que la relacionan con los demás, por lo tanto, del rol de madre. Por su parte, la Gran Madre es sobre todo un “ser para otro”: desde el punto de vista positivo engendra, alimenta y, en su cara negativa, mata a sus hijos si no son capaces de separarse de ella. Los hijos vienen después de la madre, luego del origen y deben librar una fuerte lucha para adquirir su independencia y su separación del útero inicial, para volverse individuos. Este es el momento de determinación simple y generativo de lo femenino. Atenea no está de espaldas de la Gran Madre y seguramente se identificó con ella como madre montaña de la acrópolis, pero ha superado el momento primigenio y se identifica con la etapa reproductiva superada; esa es la determinación de Sofía. No es varón porque ha criado, pero, como las mujeres guardianas, carece de lazos domésticos y sus acciones están determinadas por una voluntad que comprende y anticipa lo que la circunda. Atenea representa la superación del útero y centra el sentido en su capacidad de pensar y de actuar. La indumentaria militar de la diosa acompaña a la cabeza de la Medusa que ha cazado Perseo con ayuda de Palas. La Medusa es una representación de lo negativo de la Gran Madre, aquello que el héroe debe matar para lograr su autonomía o terminará por engullirlo. Atenea es lo femenino que acompaña al héroe en la liberación de la madre monstruosa.

Un mito sobre Atenea relata cómo ella fue vista involuntariamente por Tiresias, un mediodía apacible en que la diosa se bañaba, luego de desnudarse, con su favorita, la ninfa Cariclo. El poema mencionado de Calímaco describe con vivacidad y economía ese encuentro desafortunado. La diosa, al ver que el joven la ha visto, se encoleriza y lo ciega. Lo castiga en el lugar de la osadía: los ojos (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 82). Palas protege la inviolabilidad de su cuerpo impenetrable de guerrera con la dura condena que somete al niño (Call. *Lav.Pall.* 82, 87, 93), quien, con solo verla desnuda, parece haberla vulnerado o poseído.

La diosa actúa de esa manera con Tiresias gracias a su superioridad divina. Las guardianas, en cambio, no tendrían ese poder. Sin embargo, Sócrates se da cuenta de que una consecuencia de la igualdad entre mujeres y varones en relación con la educación es que deberán ejercitarse en el gimnasio. Etimológicamente, gimnasio en griego indica desnudez. Las mujeres se entrenarán desnudas o no podrán llegar a ser guerreras. Un obstáculo que seguramente tendrá la propuesta de *La república* de las mujeres en



el gobierno y el ejército, pues sería exponer los cuerpos desnudos de las jóvenes. Sócrates enfrenta así la objeción:

Que las mujeres de nuestros guardianes, por tanto, se desnuden, ya que se cubrirán con la virtud en lugar del vestido, y que con ellos tomen parte en la guerra y en lo demás que atañe a la vigilancia de la ciudad; sólo que de estas tareas habrá que asignar a las mujeres, antes que a los varones, las más livianas, en razón de la debilidad de su sexo. Y si algún hombre se ríe de ver a las mujeres desnudas y que ejercitan su cuerpo con el más noble de los fines, ese tipo “recoge verde el fruto” de su risa, ya que ignora en absoluto, al parecer, de qué se ríe ni lo que hace.<sup>21</sup> (Pl. *Rep.* 457a 6-b5)

La intervención de Sócrates implícitamente reconoce la dificultad de que la falta de vestido erotice a las guardianas y las deje expuestas a la burla: las debilite. La mención de la debilidad del sexo apunta en esa dirección, más que constituirse en una declaración absoluta de la inferioridad de lo femenino, que sería contradictoria con la totalidad de la propuesta de igualdad de varones y mujeres en la vida política. Respecto de la erotización del desnudo de las jóvenes que se entrenan en el gimnasio, Sócrates dirige su atención a los que así lo harían. Sin embargo, nada dice del sentimiento de las muchachas. Los que vean los cuerpos desnudos como objetos de deseo no saben lo que hacen, ellos no comprenden el ropaje de virtud que cubre esos cuerpos, afirma Sócrates. La virtud (*aretē*) se plantea como un anafrodisíaco, aquello que anula el deseo de algún transeúnte. La indiferencia de las muchachas y la protección de la *aretē* serían los antidotos contra la lascivia. Podemos inferir que las jóvenes deben sentir como los varones que son vistos en el gimnasio de la *polis*: indiferentes a los observadores y orgullosos de su propio cuerpo entrenado.

21 “Ἀποδυτέον δὴ ταῖς τῶν φυλάκων γυναιξίν, ἐπεὶ περ ἀρετὴν ἀντὶ ἱματίων ἀμφιέσονται, καὶ κοινωνητέον πολέμου τε καὶ τῆς ἄλλης φυλακῆς τῆς περὶ τὴν πόλιν, καὶ οὐκ ἄλλα πρακτέον· τούτων δ’ αὐτῶν τὰ ἐλαφρότερα ταῖς γυναιξίν ἢ τοῖς ἀνδράσι δοτέον διὰ τὴν τοῦ γένους ἀσθένειαν. ὁ δὲ γελῶν ἀνὴρ ἐπὶ γυμναῖς γυναιξί, τοῦ βελτίστου ἕνεκα γυμναζομέναις, ἀτελεῖ τοῦ γελοίου σοφίας δρέπων καρπὸν, οὐδὲν οἶδεν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἐφ’ ᾧ γελᾷ οὐδ’ ὅτι πράττει· κάλλιστα γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο καὶ λέγεται καὶ λελέξεται”.

## Conclusiones

La exposición de la comunidad de mujeres aparece abruptamente en el inicio del libro v de *La república*, sin ser sugerida ni anunciada previamente en la obra. Incluso la iniciativa de desarrollarla no es de Sócrates, el narrador del proyecto, sino que se lleva a cabo en el discurso por insistencia de los contertulios. Sócrates la enuncia mostrando las dificultades de interpretación que puede tener y lo impopular que puede llegar a ser. No obstante, las objeciones son refutadas con contundencia argumentativa y no dudamos que fue una propuesta seria para el autor. Está planteada como investigación y como partida de una reflexión sobre la justicia social (la justicia de las mujeres), aunque no plantee una línea de acción política concreta. La ciudad justa que pueda garantizar la felicidad de sus ciudadanos será una en la que las mejores mujeres compartan todas las tareas con los mejores varones: la guerra, el gobierno y la filosofía son los espacios principales de esta revolucionaria *koinonía*.

El mito de Palas, la madre simbólica de los atenienses, y su reelaboración en la *koinonía* de *La república* plantean un arquetipo femenino que no se centra en la noción de la Gran Madre, de la que todo nace, sino que surge de la superación de esta determinación en una más compleja: la adquisición de la autonomía de los vínculos familiares y la sabiduría. Este paso se hace mediante la integración de la experiencia de la separación de la madre, momento que se identifica con el nacimiento de la conciencia y con la masculinidad. Que las mujeres se ocupen de la guerra simboliza la adquisición de la independencia de la madre que es propia de lo masculino. Atenea y las guardianas transitan la masculinidad que queda integrada y sus determinaciones femeninas se modifican con esta integración. El relato de las guardianas, en esencia, no simplemente despoja a lo femenino de la procreación, la seducción, la casa, sino que, en virtud de la porosidad de las nociones de masculino y femenino y del proceso de adquisición de cada uno de sus contrarios, considera lo femenino en un momento ulterior de su desarrollo. Tal vez por estas razones las mujeres guardianas, además de militares, llegarán a ser filósofas reinas, justas y sabias gobernantes.

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# The Symbolic Imagination: Plato and Contemporary Business Ethics

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## Abstract

The business ethics field contains a number of explanations for the imagination's influence on decision-making. This has benefited moral theorizing because approaches that utilize the imagination tend to acknowledge important biological and psychological forces that influence the way we understand situations, develop strategies for problem-solving, and choose courses of action. But, I argue, the broad range of approaches has also served as an obstacle to theory development in the field. Given the variety of theoretical and disciplinary approaches, coupled with the diversity of applications, it would be fair to judge the current state of theory as fractured. To bring focus to theory development, this conceptual study of the moral imagination is grounded in the work of one discipline, one theorist, one text: Plato's *Republic*. The primary outcome of this study is the demonstration of the conditions under which the imagination serves to augment and support rationality rather than serving as an impediment. The systematic nature of Plato's theory aids in the formation of more coherent conceptual grounding than currently available in the field. A final contribution of this study is the positioning of Plato as a proper beginning or foundation to any further theory development in the moral imagination.

**Keywords** Moral imagination · Plato · Kant

## Introduction

The imagination plays an important role in contemporary business ethics. One can hardly find an ethics case where the imagination is not applied as an explanation, or its lack posited as a cause of ethical lapses. Viewing the literature from one angle, the lack of imagination helps to explain fraud, cheating, and socially malignant behavior (Gold 2010; Seabright and Schminke 2002). Viewed from a different angle, the imagination serves as a source of inspiration for rule-breaking behavior and values innovation within an organization (Caldwell and Moberg 2007; Vidaver-Cohen 1997). It is surely the malleability of imagination's meaning that explains its popularity and supports its ease of application across disparate areas of moral consideration. The concept of imagination, it would seem, promises an explanation to many of ethics' most intractable problems. But, is this too good to be true? Can one actor play such different roles?

Werhane (1995) provided the foundational argument for the consideration of moral imagination in the field of business ethics. In that paper, she provided what became the operative definition of the moral imagination for the field. Given the influence of this definition on subsequent studies, it is important to present it here in its entirety:

- (1) Reproductive imagination: (a) an awareness of one's context, (b) awareness of the "script" or schema functioning in that context, and (c) awareness of possible moral conflicts or dilemmas that might arise in that context—dilemmas created at least in part by the dominating script.
- (2) Productive imagination, which consists of revamping one's schema to consider new possibilities within the scope of one's situation and/or role.
- (3) Creative imagination, or free reflection: (a) the ability to envision and actualize possibilities that are not context-dependent but encouraged by or project a fresh schema, and/or (b) the ability to envision possibilities that other reasonable persons could envision. Morally imaginative free play also includes (c) evaluation: (i) envisioning how morally to justify actualizing these possibilities and/or (ii) how to evaluate both the status

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quo and these newly formulated possible outcomes (p. 19).

This constructed definition of the moral imagination is based loosely on the work of Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Mark Johnson. I call Werhane's definition constructed because it is not taken directly from the work of a single historical figure but is instead an amalgamation of different insights from different philosophers across time, space, and culture. Methodologically, I find this somewhat problematic because of the interpretive risks associated with taking constructs and theories out of their historical and disciplinary contexts, or from across cultural and linguistic boundaries and then mixing and matching them together as if there is a natural fit. Without a deep acknowledgment of the original context, constructs and theories can get bent. This approach also places limitations on any claims to what can be reasonably inferred from the underlying fragments, either individually or as components of a new mixture. It is the understanding within the original context that assists in explaining the construct's carry-over value into the new context.

Conceptual ambiguity or fuzziness can serve to alienate intended audiences. Moberg and Seabright (2000), for example, suggested that Werhane's (1995) philosophical definition of the imagination is imprecise and difficult to operationalize. Unfortunately, this led them to seek clarification in the field of developmental psychology rather than within philosophy. I believe that such actions are a loss for the field, precisely because the history of philosophy has so much to offer to management theory. For those of us who, like Werhane, are philosophers, it is imperative that we couch our arguments in clear terms that allow for ease of adoption without diluting the philosophy itself. It is the provisional nature of Werhane's (1995) theoretical connection to Kant, Mill, and Johnson, and the broad scope of attributes that inject instability into an otherwise sound contribution. This instability would be better managed if the field had a theory of the imagination that was based on a single historical figure who, unlike Kant, envisioned the imagination as a central concept in their moral philosophy. Plato offered this philosophical foundation and it is to his work that I will ground a more stable theory of the imagination. By using a singular focus on Plato, a contribution of this paper is to provide not the first foundation, but instead a coherent philosophical foundation for further explorations of the moral imagination in the field of business ethics.

For Plato, it is the potent combination of political power and people's natural competitive inclinations that serve as the fundamental threat to a civil society. The imagination's role in this process stokes the passionate desires of this anti-social urge through the presentation of dark and fantastic images that then become the basis for harmful action. In Plato's writings, these actions include infidelity, theft,

and murder, among others. If Plato was writing now, one could argue that he would choose issues related to sexual harassment and misconduct; continued racial, ethnic, and religious forms of violence; and even the uses of secretly obtained personal information for the purpose of marketing and profiling as paradigmatic of the imagination at work in the wrong way. This is what gives the issue of the moral imagination its contemporary salience and gravity. The imagination continues to be the social problem that must be solved for the sake of society. Following Plato, the solution to the problem of the imagination is not just to theorize more deeply about the imagination itself, creating more and more distinctions. Rather, the solution must also include more and more sophisticated theories of rationality and, most importantly, the relationship it has to the imagination. We find this at the heart of Plato's political philosophy.

The imagination in human reasoning is an important, if neglected, dimension of Plato's theory of justice found in the *Republic* (1992 [c. 380 BC]).<sup>1</sup> In Plato's psychology, imagination can influence and support the desires of both the rational and non-rational parts of the psyche through its image-producing capacity. Where it directs the greater balance of its attention depends on the nature of the rational part, and how compelling the imagination finds it at any given moment in its development (Bundy 1922; Cooper 1984; Thayer 1977). The rational part of the psyche can be developed and transformed through exposure to arts, literature, and ultimately philosophy (Frémeaux et al. 2018; Hartman 2006; Jaeger 1939; Moss 2007; Reeve 2010; Thompson 1999). When it is in a higher stage of development, rationality can exert substantial influence over the imagination, using imagination to stoke its intellectual desires and actions. But in its earlier stages of development, rational desires lack the support of the imagination, which is much more interested in the appeal of non-rational desires.

I call the idea that the imagination has two different foci (e.g., it can face toward either the rational or the non-rational parts of the psyche), the dual-aspect imagination; it forms the foundation of Plato's argument concerning the imagination's ability to contribute to social justice. Four distinct categories of the imagination can be extrapolated from Plato's *Republic*: (a) constructive symbolic, (b) non-constructive symbolic, (c) constructive calculative, and (d) non-constructive calculative. As I will demonstrate, this classification scheme is valuable

<sup>1</sup> Following a long-standing tradition in Plato studies, I treat the character Socrates in the *Republic* as a proxy for Plato's own philosophy. While there remains an active debate concerning the actual relationship between Socrates and his student Plato, and also the resulting organization of the Socratic dialogues into early, middle, and late works, that debate does not substantially affect the uses of the *Republic* in this paper. For background on this debate see Graham (1992), Cooper (1997a, b), Ferrari (2010), Whiting (2016).

because it provides a better way to understand and organize the potential applications of the imagination within the field of business ethics. Fundamentally, it is Plato's concepts of symbolic imagination and philosophical rationality that undergird this classification system.

This paper offers contributions in both method and content. Given my focus on a historical foundation for my theory of imagination, the methodological approach chosen was developed to satisfy the strictures of historiography. This is demonstrated through a heavy reliance on the philological community around Classical Greek texts. My explication of Plato is sensitive to the spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries between contemporary readers of the *Republic* and the moment of its textual production. This approach could be a useful model for other business ethics scholars who would ground their work in historical texts and theories. The main contribution of content is the explication of Plato's classification of the imagination and his emphasis on the development of the nature of rationality from calculative to philosophical. It is through my use of Plato that I propose a new path forward for the field that acknowledges the strengths of current contributions while providing a better account for existing conceptual shortcomings. Given the central arguments of the *Republic*, my content contribution is particularly valuable for analyses of the abuse of power within organizations and societies. In the end, theorists of the moral imagination will be able to proceed on a more stable foundation by grounding its theory in Plato's *Republic*.

This paper will proceed as follows: In the next section, I provide a brief review of the current literature on the moral imagination as a demonstration of the breadth of ideas that now fall under its umbrella. The next section is the theoretical heart of the paper, where I provide an explication of the classification of the imagination based on Plato's *Republic*. I will then use the classification system to sort through the current literature as a demonstration of the taxonomy's conceptual efficacy. An outcome of this paper will be to question the popular idea that the imagination is a source of empathy between two people. A second outcome will be to foreground the debate between those who would argue for a rationalized conception of the imagination against those who believe that the imagination is best described as outside and unaffected by rationality. These two issues will be taken up in the discussion section of the paper, which will synthesize the implications of Plato's theory of the imagination and consider potential future paths of research.

## Werhane and Other Approaches to Moral Imagination

Anthropologist Stankiewicz (2016) made the following observation about the current state of theory in his field:

The concept [imagination] no longer holds together in any meaningful way and its semantic excess and ambiguity tend to thwart, or stand in for, more careful ethnographic attention to the process and practices by which people come to know and think about themselves and others. (p. 797)

This is an apt description of the current state of theory in the field of business ethics. Several scholars have explored the connection between the imagination, ethics, and managerial decision-making. Key examples include studies by Werhane (1995, 1999, 2002, 2008), Vidaver-Cohen (1997), Moberg and Seabright (2000), Seabright and Schminke (2002), Collier (2006), Caldwell and Moberg (2007), Roca (2010), and Whitaker and Godwin (2013). These efforts bear the virtues of experimentation, innovation, interdisciplinarity, and inclusivity. Taken as a whole, these pioneering studies represent a stream of theory that is growing in its influence. But, as I will demonstrate below, the group does not hold together particularly well when examined from the perspective of theory construction. I believe this is symptomatic of the confusion injected into the field by Werhane's constructed definition. While Werhane succeeded in producing a bloom in imagination research in our field, we are now at a point where some structure and organization will aid in its adoption more broadly.

I will briefly demonstrate how a sample of the current studies varies across the theoretical dimensions of definition, source text and discipline, and problem type. When I consider definition, I compare how different scholars define the imagination and its operation within their study, which is sometimes quite vague. I also explore the wide range of disciplines and the variety of source texts in the field can lead to equivocation, where different authors who seem to be writing about the imagination have very different conceptions of imagination as a construct. Finally, I explore how the theoretical problem for which the imagination is posited as a solution varies from study to study. It is hard to claim that these studies build on each other when they all seem to be using the imagination in different and incompatible ways.

The definitions of the imagination point to a complex mix of abilities, each of which makes a positive contribution to understanding the decision-making process and its institutional context. Consider the following list:

- Imagination as *evaluation*: Assessment of future possible actions (Collier 2006; Moberg and Seabright 2000; Roca 2010; Werhane 1999)
- Imagination as *innovation*: Production of novel solutions and the promotion of rule-breaking (Caldwell and Moberg 2007; Werhane 2008)

- Imagination as *critical reflexivity* or *self-awareness*: Introspection and self-awareness during the decision-making processes (Roca 2010; Vidaver-Cohen 1997)
- Imagination as *conceptualization or abstraction*: Reframing the problem (Vidaver-Cohen 1997; Werhane 2002)
- Imagination as *empathy*: Perspective-taking (Caldwell and Moberg 2007; Ciulla 1998; Gold 2010; Moberg and Seabright 2000; Seabright and Schminke 2002; Vidaver-Cohen 1997)

As can be seen, scholars attribute substantial and wide-ranging powers to the imagination. Given this broad list, I am left with at least two questions: First, does it make sense to attribute all this work to one capacity of the mind? Additionally, looked at from a different angle, if the imagination covers all these mental functions, what work is left for rationality. I believe that conceptual clarity demands reducing this list to a coherent and defensible set. As will be shown, it will also be important to not ascribe to the imagination what can already be explained simply within standard accounts of rationality. Otherwise, the field may tend to overemphasize the imagination at the risk of underdeveloping its operative conception of rationality. It is the relationship between the imagination and rationality that will be central to this study's explication of Plato's psychology.

In addition to a wide range of definitions, these authors appeal to a variety of source theorists across many academic disciplines. Werhane (1995, 1999), as the leading example, constructed her definition primarily from key writers in the history of Western philosophy, using Adam Smith's theory of sympathy to ground her claim that the imagination can potentially procure a more empathetic style of managerial decision-making. Kant, on the other hand, undergirded Werhane's idea that the imagination supports the process of cultural transcendence, which allows the decision maker to reduce bias and gain self-awareness. Werhane also appealed to Johnson's (1993) work on the imagination, which is heavily informed by cognitive science.

A different example comes from Moberg and Seabright (2000), who examined the imagination's potential role in moral development and appealed to the psychologist James Rest's four-component model of moral reasoning. A final example comes from Roca (2010), who pulled broadly from the psychology literature, such as Jean Piaget, and Western philosophy to develop a notion of moral intuition. Each of these studies was built to satisfy different disciplinary standards, raising the question of the legitimacy their comparison.

I would find this phenomenon less problematic if the authors acknowledged the methodological issues potentially encountered by comparativist or interdisciplinary theory construction. Without that recognition, the resulting theories risk appearing facile.

For what kinds of problems does the imagination serve as a solution? The answer to this question also varies widely in the literature. For example, some authors see the imagination as a guard against revenge (Seabright and Schminke 2002), or as a brake against processes that dehumanize stakeholder groups, such as employees in blue collar industries (Roca 2010). There is also a group that views imagination as the missing link in a conceptual puzzle, such as the problem of foundationalism in business ethics pedagogy (Gold 2010), or the assumed separation between ethical and business considerations in a decision-making process (Fougere et al. 2014).

With so many kinds of problems being discussed in the literature, it remains difficult to determine the discursive center of gravity. What is the problem that business ethicists seem most concerned with when appealing to the moral imagination? There is no clear answer to the question at the current stage of theory development. The lack of a theoretical center is a fundamental problem for conceptions and applications of the moral imagination in our field. I offer Plato's classification scheme of the imagination as a new and powerful way of centering the discourse and overcoming the identified weaknesses in the current literature stream.

## The Development of Philosophical Rationality and Symbolic Imagination in Plato's *Republic*

We can see most clearly that those who practice justice do it unwillingly and because they lack the power to do injustice, if in our thoughts we grant to a just and unjust person the freedom to do whatever they like. We can then follow both of them and see where their desires would lead. And we'll catch the just person red-handed traveling the same road as the unjust. The reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more. This is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness with respect... This, some would say, is the great proof that one is

never just willingly but only when compelled to be. (359c–360c).<sup>2</sup>

In this quote, we find the clearest articulation of the fundamental problem that Plato, through the narrative of the *Republic*, attempted to solve, e.g., that the desire to take advantage of other people is an essential trait of human nature. Social and political institutions must be created to curb the influence of our natural anti-social urge to outdo others. For Plato, it is these natural urges that help to explain bad behavior in society; his prime examples of this included killing, infidelity, and theft. In the *Republic*, Plato was challenged to design a social and political system where citizens would choose to act against these natural urges and work for the betterment of society. He chose to answer this social challenge by first focusing on the composition of the individual psyche and exploring how it forms judgements and motivates actions. On this basis, it is possible to apply the understanding and the image of the well-ordered psyche analogically to what a well-ordered society might look like (368d–e).

The imagination enters this story in an interesting way. The audience is asked to think of someone who has suddenly gained the power of invisibility. This person, who may have never even thought to kill, cheat, or steal, is now in a position to do just about anything *imaginable*. Given the natural urge to outdo others, it is assumed that our friend will choose to act in the most wicked ways. The issues here are two-fold. First, the moral anthropology is predatory, e.g., people have a natural inclination to take advantage of other people. The second issue is one of power and politics. Invisibility stands in as a proxy for impunity, the idea that one can act against others without any worry of punishment or actions. Concerns about abuse of power sit at the heart of the *Republic*, especially as it proposed a vision of society whose leadership class aspires to the best society for all members and not simply those in the highest position. The use of the imagination by the powerful to envision and design scenarios for satisfying predatory urges is the specific force that must be counteracted for the benefit of greater personal happiness and social cohesion. In other words, in the beginning of the *Republic*, the imagination is a part of the problem (359c–360d).

Contemporary examples of the abuse of power within business settings are abundant. Sexual harassment and abuse scandals in the entertainment, restaurants, fashion, and higher education industries litter the front pages of national newspapers. At universities, hazing continues to dominate Greek-life culture, where members enact rituals of violence

and humiliation on aspirants or pledges. Aggressive policing practices, where unarmed at-risk youth are apprehended through violent and even lethal tactics, are common occurrences. Corporate manufacturing and distributions centers intentionally located near national borders designed to use vulnerable populations as cheap labor remain beyond scrutiny. The abuse and sexual exploitation of youth by clergy and church officials has become so common it hardly makes the news. Technology companies collecting and selling information personal information and images without their knowledge and explicit consent has led to a national conversation about algorithmic bias. All of these examples—and the list could go on for pages—describe current business and organizational scenarios where people in positions of power act as if they had immunity and, therefore, designed elaborate schemes and rationalizations to ensnare victim after victim. The imagination's contribution to the inspiration and design of these schemes based on the abuse of power is under consideration in this study.

For Plato, the imagination has a direct and significant effect on social justice. In the ideal society described in the *Republic*, political leaders are charged with producing and reinforcing a social structure that maximizes justice and happiness for all citizens (374d–376c). Their individual judgements are the result of a complex processes in the psyche, which includes both rational and non-rational parts (Burnyeat 2006; Cooper 1977; Shields 2010). I use the term “psyche” as a rough equivalent to “soul” in Plato; both terms are considered antiquated, but I believe the contemporary concept of the “mind” is too limited to be a synonym for the Platonic soul. As the image-making capacity of the psyche, the imagination can reinforce and satisfy the different kinds of passions emanating from the rational and non-rational parts (Bundy 1922).<sup>3</sup>

A good leader makes decisions that are socially beneficial precisely because they are rational. A despot, on the other hand, uses the same capacities to rationalize self-serving and unjust actions (Seabright and Schminke 2002; Werhane 1984).<sup>4</sup> As will be discussed, the imagination plays a role in the decision-making processes of both kinds of leaders. It

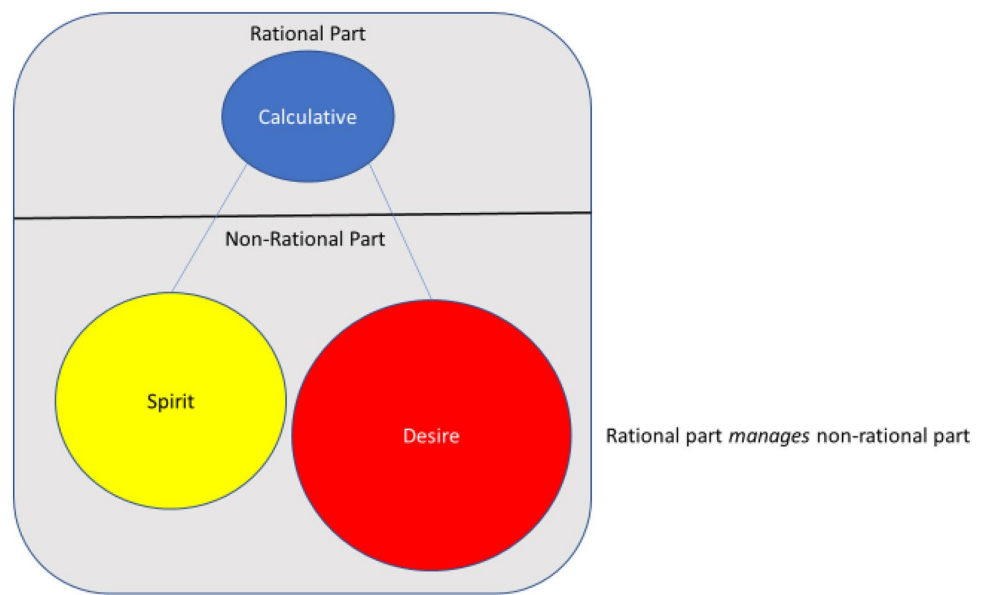
<sup>2</sup> Following convention, I cite the *Republic* by section and subsection rather than by line or page number. This will allow for cross-reference regardless of which translation is consulted.

<sup>3</sup> A short note about my use of the term non-rational: Plato posited that there are three elements in the psyche, the rational, spirited, and appetitive. The spirited and the appetitive elements together comprise the non-rational part of the psyche. Sometimes the non-rational part of the psyche prevails over the rational part in a given decision process. In this situation, it would be incorrect to say that that judgement was non-rational, but instead it would more correctly be characterized as irrational.

<sup>4</sup> Following Grube's translation of the *Republic* (1992), 344a *pleonexia* as “[What] one succumbs to when one always wants to outdo everyone else by getting and having more and more. *Pleonexia* is, or is the cause of, injustice since always wanting to outdo others leads one to try get what belongs to them, what isn't one's own. (p. 344a, note 18). Also, Burnyeat (2006) noted, “Thrasymachus assumed, and Glaucon did not deny, that what lies deepest in human nature is *pleo-*



**Fig. 1** Basic description of the psyche



plays an important role in both character development and higher education of the leaders who are tasked with promoting social justice (Jaeger 1939; Moss 2007; Reeve 2010). In the end, the attainment of greater social justice for any given society depends on its leaders having a well-tempered character and a balanced and harmonious psyche, one that will promote constructive uses of the imagination.<sup>5</sup>

### Plato's Mental Model

Under Plato's description, the psyche is composed of three separate elements, a subject that has been the topic of voluminous scholarship over the centuries and continues to challenge contemporary scholars (Ferrari 2007; Shields 2010).

At this stage [of Plato's argument in the *Republic*] the three elements in the soul are distinguished principally by their function: Calculation calculates, desire desires, and spirit gets spirited. If the text is pressed

to assign them an object or goal as well as an activity, the indications would be that calculation is concerned with the good (i.e., with the best course of action); desire is concerned with pleasure; while spirit reacts to perceived slights or wrongs. (Ferrari 2007, p. 165).

As demonstrated in the passage quoted above, the basic model of the psyche includes three elements: rational, desiring, and spirited. Each element has its own function in the reasoning process, and its own motivation for operation. The desiring element finds its motivation in satisfying basic biological appetites, needs, and wants; this includes the desire for food, water, domicile, and sex. The spirited element seeks to establish honor and protect self-worth. The rational element demonstrates its ability for forethought by evaluating options for future action and calculating the rewards available from each. For Plato, the rational element can develop beyond being merely calculative, but that development demands extended training in math, the arts, and philosophy. At this point in this explication of his theory, it is simply important to know that in the early stages of its development, the calculative rational element chooses mostly between options presented by the desiring and spirited elements, aided by the image-generation capability of the imagination.

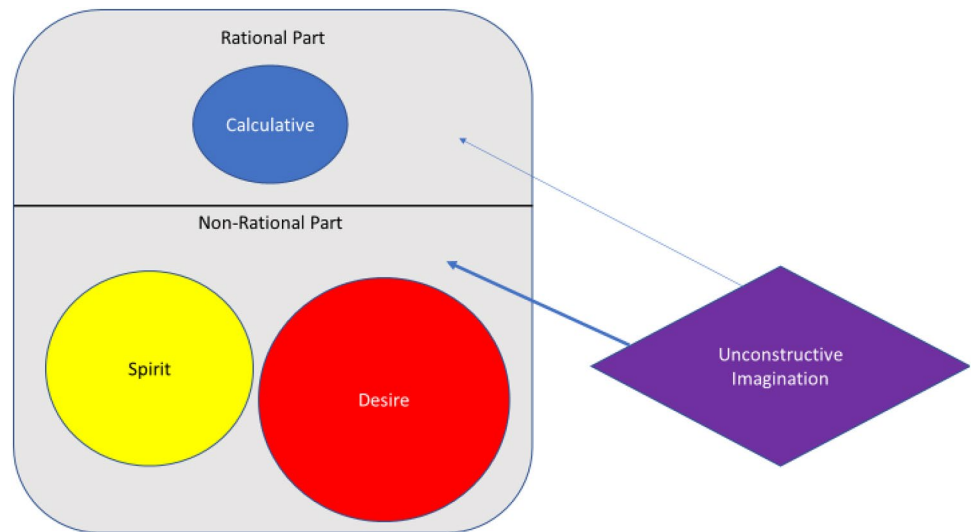
The psyche is also organized in a hierarchical manner with the calculative or rational element guiding and managing the other two (Fig. 1). According to Plato, human reasoning is characterized as a process of negotiation where the calculative rational element serves as arbiter over the passionate non-rational forces of desire and spirit, each seeking its own form of pleasure, using the capacities of

Footnote 4 (continued)

*nexia*. This term covers both the desire for more and more and the desire for more than what others have. It is both greed and competitiveness, all rolled into one" (pp. 20, 21). One can interpret Plato's argument for justice in the *Republic* as an answer to fundamental threat *pleonexia* presents to civic society; e.g., how does a society overcome the natural desire of its members to outdo each other?

<sup>5</sup> Following Grube's (1992) translation of *Republic*, *sōphrosunē* was defined as "[Self]-control, good sense, reasonableness, temperance, and (in some contexts) chastity. Someone who keeps his head under pressure or temptation possesses *sōphrosunē*" (p. 430d, note 7). Plato's provisional definition of justice as harmony (*Republic* 443b–444a).

**Fig. 2** Underdeveloped rationality with imagination



the imagination to further its respective interests. “For [the reasoning part] to rule here takes the form of deciding on its own authority what is the best thing to do, issuing injunctions, and seeing to it that the required action is undertaken (Cooper 1984, p. 6).”<sup>6</sup> Under this description, calculation is a rather thin form of rationality because it is simply a manager rather than a leader.

Calculative rationality lacks both passion and principles e.g., through habituation and enculturation it has obtained social values, but it does not possess principles that form the basis of real intellectual passion.<sup>7</sup> This means that the calculative element does not experience any great pleasure in the actions of its judgements. In the face of hot, passionate appeals by one or both of the non-rational elements, the cool management style of the calculative element with its value-driven reasons rarely prevails (Moss 2007). Calculative rationality, though it has its function, is an unreliable mechanism to produce social justice, because its judgements are overly influenced by the force of non-rational desires (Fig. 2). “Akrasia,” or weakness of will, is one of the manifestations of the struggle faced by calculative rationality. One way to describe the phenomenon is that the psyche knows the right thing to do, but due to the weakness of the passions of calculative rationality, is unable to overcome the strong passions influence of the non-rational desires.

### The Development of Philosophical Rationality

For those preparing for leadership, Plato prescribed a philosophical higher education and training that would transform the natures of their rational element from calculative to philosophical (521c–534a). Philosophical rationality, he argued, can prescribe actions to maintain or increase justice within society precisely because it is acquainted with principles that justify actions. Examples of philosophical principles include definitions developed through extended dialectical argumentation and the axiomatic rules of geometry (Cherniss 1951; Vlastos 1988). These principles were important to Plato, because they purported to explain what appeared to be inconsistent and changing, such as the movement of planets, by unchanging laws of geometry.<sup>8</sup>

Social justice, for Plato, had to be similarly grounded in principles that established the right values for a community.<sup>9</sup> In the *Republic*, he even required extended study of mathematics before the study of ethics and morality, for fear that without knowledge of principles, ethical understanding would be malignant (Vlastos 1988). Mathematics and logic push toward abstraction and general understanding rather

<sup>6</sup> “Does not it belong to the rational part to rule, being wise and exercising forethought on behalf of the entire soul...” (Cooper 1977, p. 152).

<sup>7</sup> “Education begins in imagination, with myths, stories, and poetry. Here the educative role of the arts is all important. But the artist is not an authority on the ends of education, on the direction of the imagination for attaining wisdom concerning human life and conduct. Imagination and imitation are means to the end, but the end is philosophic understanding” (Thayer 1977, p. 618).

<sup>8</sup> This example comes from Vlastos (1988): “There is no good reason to doubt that Plato had been the first to project the idea that the apparently inconstant motions of the planets could be accounted for by compositions of invariably constant circular motions proceeding in different planes, directions, and angular velocities” (p. 362).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that one can read the requirement that moral principles align with scientific understanding as a social construction, because it would be assumed that the principles would be discovered through the process of dialectic, an inherently social process. While Vlastos (1988) did not argue for this reading, he provided the background for the exploration of that tack.



than focusing on the merely particular. Stated another way, to have mathematical and logical knowledge, one must understand the *relationship* between the particular and the general and not simply assume, in the case of ethics, every moral dilemma is *sui generis*.

The imagination is the image-producing capacity of the psyche, but not all images are the same. About halfway through Plato's argument in the *Republic*, he articulated a mature conception of the imagination, and attributed to it the power to create different kinds of images that ultimately satisfy the desires of the three elements of the psyche (505e–511e). Some images aid in the process of understanding and scientific knowledge, while others assist in the fulfillment of non-rational yearnings. Images that aid in the former are known as symbols or icons, while the non-rational variety is called fantasies or phantasms (Bundy 1922).<sup>10</sup> In contrast to symbols, fantasies rarely serve the higher purpose of greater knowledge and understanding. For example, fantasies of revenge promote the satisfaction of the spirited element in the non-rational soul, where revenge might be desired for perceived slights that may have been warranted. Both sets of images are influential on the reasoning process, but their influence varies given the developmental stage of rationality (534a).

### The Symbolic Imagination

After the achievement of philosophical rationality, the imagination is more often called upon to produce symbols and icons. My name for this mode of operation is the *symbolic imagination*. By contrast, if rationality is merely calculative, then the imagination will mostly serve the non-rational part of the psyche through the creation of fantasies and phantasms. I call this the *calculative imagination*. Therefore, there is a strong correspondence between the nature of rationality, the directional focus of the imagination, and the type of image it produces.

An example is in order: A student can use a sketch of a triangle on a sheet of paper as a study that helps conceptualize the properties of a triangle and the axiomatic principles that define a triangle in geometric space. It is the *conceptual* triangle rather than the *material* triangle (the one on the sheet of paper) that is the product of the imagination, and it serves scientific understanding (Bundy 1922). In this example, the conceptual triangle is a symbol (e.g., a representation of an ideal triangle). In other words, the triangle that one conceives is still a representation or mental picture of the

definition of a triangle in geometric space. Though the mental picture may be more precise than the material triangle, it still stands in for the concept of a triangle. One may say that the conceptual triangle mediates between the definition of the triangle and the understanding of the triangle by aiding the conceivability of the triangle. It is the mediating property of image-making that defines it as the symbolic imagination.

It is alone surprising that the scientist and the mathematician had been specifically recognized as men of imagination before the painter and the poet. The latter were still concerned with that lower kind of image-making rather than with the creation of images in the service of conceptual thought. (Bundy 1922, p. 370).

Since philosophical rationality seeks and finds pleasure in gaining an understanding of the world, it is that mature form of rationality that calls on the imagination to perform its symbolic function.

In referring to the transformational power of the study of mathematics, Plato asked the following of his interlocutor:

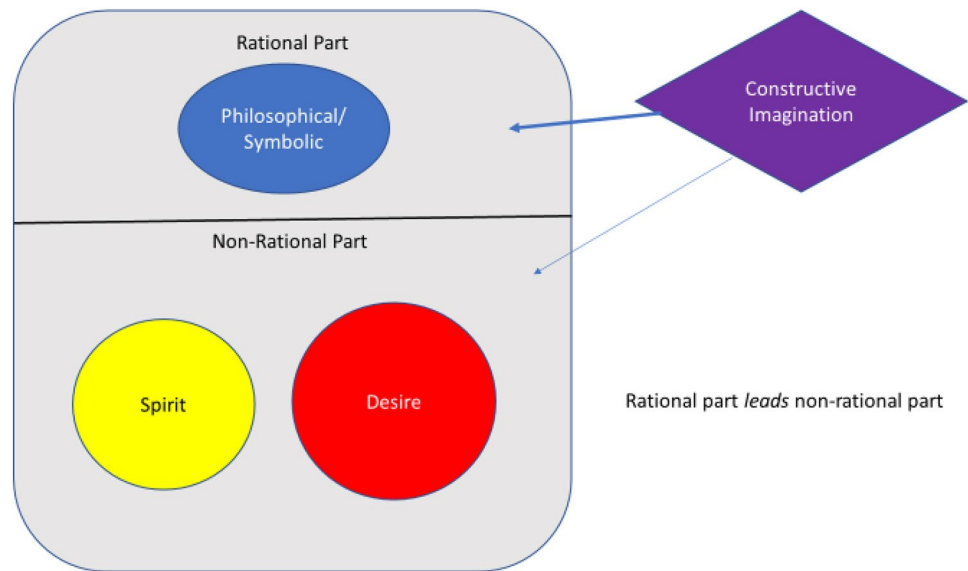
Should we not ask which study has this power? ... What is that study, Glaucon, that pulls the soul away from becoming to being?... It seems to belong to those studies we are now investigating [mathematics] which naturally lead to insight, for every way it draws us towards reality, though no one uses it aright. (Vlastos 1988, p. 364).

As a result of the philosophical education, the rational element develops a new passion for knowledge and understanding (Thayer 1977). Equally important, philosophical rationality experiences great pleasure from knowledge attainment and understanding (582d–e, 585c–586c). Unlike its calculative sibling, philosophical rationality has a strong motivation for its functioning and a robust basis for expertise and judgement. Rather than merely managing the non-rational part of the psyche, the philosophical element leads it. It is important to note that where philosophical rationality leads, the imagination seems to follow (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Driven by philosophical rationality, the imagination becomes a part of the solution for promoting social justice rather than a problematic element that must be overcome.

<sup>10</sup> As in many cases, knowing the Greek helps to understand this distinction. See Moss (2007, p. 419 n.7): "Contrast *eidōlon*, which often connotes falsehood, with the more neutral *eikōn* Plato used to refer to images elsewhere in the *Republic*."

<sup>11</sup> Following Ferrari (2007, p. 192): "[T]he person in whom the philosophic element is free to be itself, not enslaved by the other parts of the soul, is led by a true passion, a passion peculiar to this element and not intrinsically dependent on the others. The fundamental basis of its sway over the others is not its aptness for a supervisory role – though it has not lost this aptness – but the strength and nature of its passion. This manifest itself not through internal conflict but through the atrophy of the other elements in the face of an all-consuming interest, as when water is channeled to a single irrigation ditch and the others run relatively dry."

**Fig. 3** Developed rationality with imagination



### The Imagination and Justice

Observe, then, Glaucon, that we won't be doing an injustice to those who've become philosophers in our city and that what we'll say to them, when we compel them to guard and care for the others, will be just... "[We've] made you kings in our city and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both for yourselves and for the rest of the city. You're better and more completely educated than the others and are better able to share in [the practical life of ruling the city and the theoretical life of studying the good itself]. Therefore, each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it, you'll see vastly better than the people there. And because you've seen the truth about fine, just, and good things you'll know each image for what it is and also that of which it is an image. Thus, for you and for us, the city will be governed, not like the majority of cities nowadays, by people who fight over shadows and struggle against one another in order to rule – as if that were a great good – but by people who are awake rather than dreaming, for the truth is certainly this: A city whose prospective rulers are least eager to rule must of necessity be most free from civil war, whereas a city with the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way." (520a–d).

The third and final set of distinctions in Plato's classification system concerns the constructiveness or non-constructiveness of the imagination's contribution to social justice (Bundy 1922). The imagination is constructive when, through the exercise of its capacity by leaders, it supports the

aims of justice in a society (443c–444a). In Plato's theory, it is the philosophers who should lead, because they are the members of society who have the benefit of philosophical rationality and can, as a result, work to produce a society modeled after the symbolic images of the good society. This can be accomplished in concert with either the calculative or philosophical rationality, though the latter is the more sure-fire route due to its greater abilities of conceptualization and passionate desire to achieve its vision. It is possible that a calculative rationality could also prove constructive, such as the generation of fantasies that produce empathy in one person for another person or group. But, due to the intellectual and motivational limits of calculation, a society's reliance on this mode should be attenuated.

A constructive use of the symbolic imagination interacting with philosophical rationality is one where a principled and conceptual goal is attained or at least used as a model (592b). It is one that Plato would say has achieved a "unified vision" by bringing together a concept of goodness (attainable through the familiarity with principles from philosophical training) with a strategic action into one symbolic image (537c). For example, an economics approach to food distribution that appeals to mathematical modeling and biology would represent a philosophical approach. This use of the symbolic imagination produces little care for the plight of any given individual—a weakness of the calculative variety—but instead would aid in visioning a solution that maximizes the overall wellbeing of society. Finally, those with a philosophical nature would, ultimately, be able to put society's interests ahead of their own; this is what makes them most suited for leadership. Given that a society's leaders are in the strongest position to abuse their power, Plato's theory argued it is vital that the leaders be philosophical and, for that reason, reluctant to lead. The assumption here

**Table 1** Classification of imagination in Plato's *Republic*

I. Non-constructive symbolic imagination Symbolic production that contributes to greater individual rationality and pleasure, but does not prioritize the social good	II. Constructive symbolic imagination Symbolic production that contributes to greater individual rationality and prioritizes its application for the betterment of social good over any individual or class
III. Non-constructive calculative imagination Fantasy production that prioritizes the individual's non-rational desires without much consideration of the social good	IV. Constructive calculative imagination Fantasy production that aims to promote the social good without having knowledge of what the social good would entail

Plato's organization of the imagination, its relationship to rationality, and its mode of contributing to social justice

is that the philosophers have the temperament and balance to resist their natural urges to take advantage of the citizens and instead find their pleasure through participation in good governance and life in a peaceful city.

Non-constructive uses of the imagination fall into two categories, depending on which kind of rationality is present. Non-constructive uses of the imagination occur when the rational nature is philosophical and the goal of producing symbols and icons is purely for the pleasure of the individual, with no intention to act in the promotion of social good or justice. If the philosopher is solely interested in their own self-interest, their philosophical training is, in a sense, wasted on them (520a–d). For Plato, a major risk that accompanied his belief that the leadership should be philosophically trained was the fear that they would then be unwilling to become leaders given the higher quality of pleasure those with a philosophical nature derive from knowledge-seeking.<sup>12</sup>

Non-constructive uses of the imagination by calculative rationality demand a somewhat different explanation. Remember that though calculative rationality manages the psyche, it does not have much motivation of its own and is overrun by the strong desires of the non-rational elements. Under this condition, the imagination does not interact with calculative rationality so much as it spends most of its energy serving the passions and desires of the spirited and appetitive elements. In other words, when rationality is merely calculative, it cannot combat or serve as counterpoint to non-rational desires. The non-constructive imagination is the source of most archetypal human vices, such as infidelity and theft.

Plato's complex description of the imagination in the *Republic* includes three considerations. The first consideration is whether the nature of the rational element in the psyche has matured from being merely calculative to being philosophical. The second consideration concerns the nature of the images the imagination produces given the nature of the rationality with which it interacts. The imagination

produces fantasies for calculative rationality and symbols for philosophical rationality. Finally, there is the question concerning whether the imagination supports social justice by promoting ethical decision-making through its activities. The imagination's contribution is constructive when the results of its activities serve the common good (592b). The dynamic relationships between these three considerations are mapped in Table 1.

The constructive symbolic imagination (Quadrant II) is the privileged mode in this scheme, and the key contribution of his theory. Moral progress entails moving from one of the other three quadrants toward Quadrant II. The value of this classification scheme is that it is not simply binary (e.g., having a philosophical rationality does not automatically make one's judgements and actions constructive to social justice). The complexity of this schema gives it the explanatory power to account for the powers attributed to the imagination in our field.

One of the most discussed aspects of the *Republic* is the prohibition of certain kinds of poetry from the education of youth for fear of its potential deleterious effect on their character development. Plato's basic fear was that the youth would imitate the bad habits of adults and, for Plato, the poets seem to justify bad actions and habits. Given this potential risk, he recommended censoring the poets (376e–398b). Arguments focusing on *mímēsis*, or imitation, in the *Republic* are closely related to our topic, because it is one of the more obvious connections between morality and the imagination. My study is less about the effect of poetry on the moral sensibilities of the members of society, or on character development, and more centrally about the individual and social benefits of philosophical studies. In other words, less about *paideia* (enculturation) and more about *philosophía* (love of theoretical wisdom) and *phrónēsis* (prudence or use of practical wisdom). I recommend Jaeger (1939) and Peters (1967) for a deeper understanding of these key terms.

<sup>12</sup> Plato recognized this as the rational sacrifice of the Philosopher-Kings to the polis (*Republic* 519b–520d).

## Imagination as a Source of Decision-Making, Innovation, and Empathy

In the literature review, I determined that there were roughly five functions normally attributed to the imagination: (a) evaluation, (b) innovation, (c) critical reflexivity, (d) conceptualization, and empathy. In the remainder of this section, I use Plato's classification of the imagination to engage these five functions. Stated in another way, I explain these five functions within the concepts and categories of the Platonic taxonomy. One of the contributions of this Platonic analysis is that it will show that some of the functions attributed to the imagination in the current literature are really alternate descriptions of the same phenomenon. By eliminating unnecessary redundancy, this analysis will bring better focus into further discussions of the moral imagination.

The imagination as the source for innovative decision-making is one of its most prominent functions. Characterizations of this function included the imagination as an aid to the decision makers' ability to create unusual options for possible action. Promoting rule-breaking as a norm is another way to think about the imagination's contribution to innovation (Moberg and Seabright 2000). This is the idea that organizational leaders should embrace a culture of rule questioning and affirm courageous acts of rule challenging. In such an organization, it is assumed there is less opportunity for bad decisions that affect products, services, and processes because stakeholders feel free critique the process if they imagine a bad outcome.

The idea of making rule-breaking a positive feature in the culture of an organization attaches to the important insight that participants within an organization can and ought to maintain a critical relationship with the rules, policies, and procedures that form the structure of that organization. This critical relationship demands that the person maintain a perspective that is congenial toward, but still separate from, the values and the norms of the organization. Under this argument, the critical distance creates the possibility that in some cases, the person may interpret a situation and envision a set of outcomes that potentially run counter to those expected under the norms of the organization. These counteractions have potential positive moral value as well as merely corrective value.

This kind of innovation is posited in the literature as one potential solution to the organizational problems of harassment, theft, fraud, etc. The imagination, it is supposed, supports the possibility of counteraction with its image-creation capability. For example, Werhane (1999) argued that it was a lack of imagination that explains Space Shuttle Challenger engineer's failure to blow the whistle. She used the same explanation in the Ford Pinto case. Under Werhane's description of both cases, the engineers knew there was a

problem. Given that the knowledge of a problem was not in and of itself compelling enough to motivate the engineers to intervene, I assume that these examples are clear cases of the non-constructive calculative imagination (i.e., these are examples of the risks involved with putting momentous decisions in the hands of the rationally immature).<sup>13</sup>

In keeping with the Platonic method, I could say that these decision makers were seduced by fantasies of shame from their colleagues, punishment from their bosses, or maybe even glory and esteem from their colleagues (high Pinto sales or a successful shuttle mission), which overwhelmed whatever counter-images were produced to signal the risks involved with their compliance and quietude. For Plato, the counter to the problems and risks of the merely calculative imagination is not simply more imagination, but instead mathematical and philosophical training that would have created the conditions for actions that derive from a constructive philosophical imagination. I can envision a training that would allow these executives to analyze more fully the social and personal/psychological costs of their compliance and complicity, and how those costs outweigh any personal loss associated with shame or embarrassment or any temporary gains in esteem. Innovation as a function of the imagination begins in Quadrant III or IV, but aspires for Quadrant II.

Fundamentally, though, innovation is a temporal concept used to describe a change from one state of being to another. Innovation is about the relationship between the past and the future. Used in its active or strategic sense, innovation can be thought of as an action that takes place in the present that gives, and even alters, the meaning of the relationship between past and future (and even what constitutes the "past" and the "future" for any case). Imagination supports innovation by creating images that support alternate decision paths and their consequences given an understanding of the current situation and the events that led to the need for a decision.

What we learn from Plato is that the understanding of the current situation is affected by whether a person has achieved philosophical rationality. If not, the calculative imagination will produce visions of future states fraught with fantasy. Those fantasies will impose a limit to the contribution that the imagination could have played in securing or promoting social justice. The symbolic imagination, on

<sup>13</sup> Consider Kant's (1784) fiery words: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment." An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?



the other hand, will not be limited but rather constrained. The constraint comes in the form of a gravitational pull from philosophical and mathematical knowledge accumulation—the philosophical education and intellectual tradition—and the responsibility a person will feel toward it when envisioning and choosing future paths.<sup>14</sup>

Given this understanding of innovation, I think it fair to group imagination as evaluation and as conceptualization under the umbrella concept of imagination as innovation. Both the calculative and symbolic imaginations support rational and non-rational desires for future states that are believed to be preferable to the past. The fantasies and symbols they create offer compelling visions of the future. However, building on the moral distinction already drawn between fantasies and symbols, I argue that the propulsion of the psyche toward the vision operates in a push fashion for the fantasy and in a pull fashion for the symbol.

Fantasies support the non-rational desires that constantly call for satisfaction and pleasure. The desires of the appetite, for example, propel the psyche to develop strategies for satiation. The fantasies of the calculative imagination may even rationalize theft or fraud in pursuit of its goal (Quadrant III). They may also compel the person to participate in a community garden project, thus aiding in the food production for a society without being able to give philosophical justifications for how their actions increase social good (Quadrant IV). The same could be said for desires that push the person out on the streets to seek opportunities to prove their honor and self-worth. This could manifest as a person literally going out looking for a fight (Quadrant III). It could also be the source of courage needed to be the whistleblower in a corporation (Quadrant IV). Calculative imagination, whether constructive or non-constructive, propels the person toward the fantasy of the future with a push from behind.

The vision of the future constructed by symbols produced by the philosophical imagination, in contrast, propels the person forward with a pull. Symbols are the temporal manifestation of a timeless nature and, as a result, ground their attractiveness on their promise of access to a reality they claim to represent. The axioms of geometry, once known, are timeless principles that describe the possible relations of objects in space. The symbolic triangle exercises its

compelling nature by pulling the person toward geometric relations of greater accuracy. The idea that there are more accurate ways of mapping the relation of objects satisfies the philosophical desires that derive pleasure from the learning processes that increase understanding (Quadrant I). The use of that understanding to design better and safer Ford Pintos and NASA Space Shuttles, for example, further satisfies the social responsibility that is attendant with philosophical understanding (Quadrant II). Imagination in the service of innovation is the most common and important function identified in the business ethics literature. For the most part, given the current discussion, it is what most scholars mean when they say the moral imagination.

Let us now consider the claim that the imagination promotes empathy. Empathy is fundamentally about the possibility of intersubjectivity and the relationship between one person and another. Within the context of moral theory, empathy represents the authentic desire and attempt to take the perspective of another person. As a function of the imagination, empathy is the ability to envision what it is like to have another person's experiences, to somehow see an event through their eyes (Roca 2010). The distinction between fantasies and symbols is particularly important when exploring the implications of morality.

Ciulla (1998) warned us that empathy can be misleading and that its attribution could also be a rationalization. At the heart of her warning is an epistemic issue. That is, how does one know that the interpretation one has made—the image or vision one has developed of a situation—truly represents the case at hand? Ciulla utilized a fictional character from Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea*, using the novel as a case study to highlight the propensity for fantasies to become powerful motivators for abuses of power and other encroachments. The story is about a man who moves to a small village and discovers a woman he previously had a relationship with is living there. He believes she is trapped in an unhappy marriage and takes steps to save her. But the author leaves the reader unsure of whether she was actually unhappy, or whether the fantastic image of the situation created by an old lover is merely a rationalization to serve his self-interested intervention. Recently reported examples of sexual harassment in the workplace could be used as similar case studies.

Acknowledging that there are limits to what one can know about the ideas and judgments in other people's minds, one may still feel compelled to intervene in a situation where there appears to be an abuse of power. In terms of the relationship between fantasies and symbols within the context of empathy, the symbolic image is produced in accordance with and as an indication of the social good (e.g., principles that are designed to maximize the social good). This is in contradistinction to fantasies that serve nothing but the non-rational desires (Quadrant III) or the folly of the well-intentioned but intellectually immature person who, due to the

<sup>14</sup> Consider T.S. Eliot's influential description of innovation in his (1921) essay *Tradition and Individual Talent*: "... [W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new."

lack of knowledge and understanding, does not quite know how to decide (Quadrant IV). The symbolic imagination may support intervention even if it cannot guarantee perfect knowledge of the matter. The symbolic vision may also determine that in a particular situation, it is better to show restraint and not intervene, because the value of privacy in society may be the more important overriding consideration. Conceding the general fact there is no way to completely eliminate the risk of misinterpreting the facts—the risk that the vision or fantasy of a situation is skewed—there remains a divide between a person being motivated by non-rational desires and the same person being compelled to uphold their understanding of the social good, e.g., what behavior would be demanded in general and for the most part rather than out of simple self-interest.

Based on Platonic understanding, I am skeptical of the idea that the imagination is an instrument for producing self-awareness. Self-awareness describes the need for decision makers to have an account for how their own personal traits may affect their ability to identify ethical problems. Unlike the logic that undergirds the understanding of the imagination as a source for innovation, which is principally concerned with the relationship between a person and society over time, self-awareness is principally concerned with the relationship between a person and herself in present time.<sup>15</sup> To be self-aware means being perspicacious about one's decision-making while the decision process is occurring. This raises an ontological puzzle: Given Plato's mental model, where would the imagination have to reside so that it could observe its own participation in the decision process? Also, how might Plato have to augment the imagination's capacities so that it could make its own judgments, which differs from our current description where the imagination is a contributor to judgment ultimately made by rationality?

This puzzle did not escape Plato or classical philosophy scholars. If we open the list of primary texts beyond the *Republic*, there are numerous moments in the Socratic/Platonic corpus where the notion of irony plays a central role, e.g., that because of human's epistemic limitations it is considered wise and prudent they should hold an ironic attachment to their knowledge claims. In fact, Socrates is famous for upholding the idea that he was the wisest of men precisely because he knew that his knowledge was worth nothing.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have been perplexed by this statement

and the Socratic method from which it derives, and a full explication of the arguments would take us far afield from the topic at hand (see MacKenzie 1988; Nehamas 1992; Vlastos 1987).

One approach scholars have used to explain this ironic posturing is to say that the Socrates of the early dialogues was more of a skeptic of philosophy's ability to unearth the unchanging principles of the world than Plato, who used Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own philosophy in some of the later dialogues, such as the *Republic*. The recognition of epistemic limits pushed those influenced by the Socratic/Platonic philosophy to allow, in spirit at least, for some humility as it related to claims of knowledge and understanding. But, stating in an ironic tone that one's understanding of a certain state of affairs could be otherwise does not offer instruction of what the understanding of that state of affairs actually is. In other words, if having self-awareness is an ability to hold a certain distance from one's own reasoning process, the ideas behind Socratic irony would be supportive. If making the stronger claim that self-awareness allows one to make judgments about their own reasoning process, it seems that a Socratic/Platonic justification would be left wanting.

Another related form of self-awareness shows up in several dialogues and is worth mentioning, because it directly speaks to the 'of two minds' conception of self-awareness and the experience we might have of an 'inner dialogue.' In early and late dialogues, Socrates highlighted the role of the *daimonion*, or internal voice, in decision-making:

The daimonion's intervention in his affairs is frequent and pertains to matters both momentous and trivial. That Socrates receives and obeys these monitions is well-known in Athens, and they are understood to be aporetic signs that warn him not to pursue a course of action that he is in the process of initiating. These interventions are regarded as unfailingly correct in whatever they indicate...The daimonion's generosity even extends to warning Socrates of the inadvisability of the actions intended by others, but in no case does it provide him with general, theoretical claims constitutive of the expert moral knowledge he seeks and disavows having attained [Socratic irony]. (McPherran 2005, p. 16).

Returning to the idea that the issue of self-awareness presents us with an ontological puzzle, we find a new psychic

<sup>15</sup> La Forge (2004) approached this problem from an alternate and interesting angle in his "Cultivating moral imagination through meditation."

<sup>16</sup> See Cooper (1997a, b) *Apology* (p. 23a–b): "As a result of this investigation, men of Athens, I acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden; many slanders came from these people and a reputation for wisdom, for in each case the bystanders thought that I myself possessed the wisdom that I proved that my interlocutor did not have. What is probable, gentlemen, is

Footnote 16 (continued)

that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example as if he said, "This man among you mortals is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless."

entity introduced here by Socrates that is potentially of great positive influence on ethical decision-making, though not on a consistent basis.

The fact that Plato/Socrates felt the need to introduce a new psychic entity supports the idea that the daimonion is not synonymous with the imagination. Further, following McPherran (2005), this entity does not seem to be propositional in nature and is not in the business of giving reasons for its actions. That means it is not another form of rationality. On the surface, it seems to function as more of an intuition, a non-analytical ability to grasp the moral import of a case that can dramatically affect choices of action. As in the subject of Socratic irony, the daimonion has a rich tradition of interpretation that cannot be addressed here (see also Brickhouse and Smith 2005; Van Riel 2005). Given the open-endedness of the ontological debates that surround the notions of ‘Socratic irony’ and the daimonion, I am hesitant to confer the attribution of self-awareness to Plato’s conception of the imagination at this time.

A benefit of the Platonic grounding provided by this study is that it places limits on what can logically be attributed to the moral imagination which aids in the process of theory development and maturation. As has been demonstrated, a Platonic conception limits moral theorists to choosing among just two functions of the imagination: to promote innovation and to produce empathy. Given the social priority of the constructive symbolic imagination, innovation approaches have the most legitimacy while empathetic approaches bear the risks associated with its inherent epistemic deficit due to the reliance on the calculation. Given that Plato assumed humans have a natural inclination to take advantage of one another, empathetic approaches—as we have seen—can still use the imagination as a source of abuse. Innovative approaches, on the other hand, rely on a philosophical outlook and character and, therefore, will prove to be more reliable and ethical in judgments and actions. For these reasons, it is only the imagination as innovation that can ultimately be *promoted* from the Platonic viewpoint.

## Discussion

In the introduction of the paper, I briefly discussed the Werhane’s (1995) analogical use of Kant’s philosophy in her constructed definition of the moral imagination. Now that we have established what a Platonic theory of the imagination looks like, it may pay dividends to contrast that theory with what can be understood to be a plausible Kantian position. Keep in mind that I am comparing two conceptions of the imagination rather than two conceptions of the moral imagination, since Kant’s philosophy does not allow for the latter. I enlist the aid of Kneller (1990) who considered the development of a kind of “moral” imagination within the

German Enlightenment more generally, and then positioned Kant’s philosophy within it. It turns out that the choice between Plato and Kant can be seen as a proxy for a debate about the place of the imagination in decision-making processes. It is fundamentally a choice between a rationalized versus a non-rationalized form of imagination.

A key takeaway from Plato’s theory is that the imagination plays a central role in rational decision-making through its ability to create symbols and fantasies. It is the symbolic function that serves the interest of the philosophical rationality; it makes judgments about the most just course of action. While it is true that Plato’s account also contains a non-rational use of the imagination, it is also clear that he advocated and favored the rationalized version. Calculative rationality has access to the imagination, but does not have influence over it. This is why calculative rationality loses out to the desires and passions of the non-rational part of the psyche. In this case, it is the non-rational part of the psyche that has influence over the imagination. A strength of Plato’s theory is that it accounts for both rational and non-rational accounts of the imagination.

Kant, in the other hand, seemed to be headed in a different direction. According to Kneller (1990), it was the philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, one of Kant’s senior contemporaries, who coined the term “aesthetics” and established it as a distinct philosophical discipline (p. 218). Influenced by Baumgarten’s theory, Kant developed his own aesthetic philosophy, and it is in this special realm that the imagination gets its most robust treatment. Aesthetic judgement has, “its own territory, within which... it enjoys freedom from the constraint of administering laws of cognition and morality (p. 222).” Kneller continued:

[In] aesthetic reflection, judgment is not immediately subject to the legislation of the understanding, i.e., to the categories. It is free of cognitive determination – it does not involve predicating empirical concepts of the object. Nor is judgment concerned directly with applying the Categorical Imperative in aesthetic reflection. It is therefore free of moral determination: we may not ask, in the context of purely aesthetic experience, whether or not this object is virtuous or promotes virtue. (p. 222).

From these passages, it is clear why it would be imprudent to say that Kant had an explicit theory of moral imagination, something that both Werhane and Kneller warned against.

While there isn’t the space here to render Kant’s full argument, it is very important to note that in his philosophy of mind or psychology, the decision-making processes that involve moral consideration are separated from those that make aesthetic judgments, e.g., judgments about beauty. Aesthetic judgment is not an exercise in reason-giving, but instead is characterized as the result of an intuition based on



feelings produced in the mind by the imagination in a state of free “play” (pp. 222–223). Kant considered the imagination’s rather limited value derived from its representation of freedom in the purely aesthetic experience. Unlike Plato, Kant offered little evidence of a symbolic imagination; this limits our ability to use his philosophy as a foundation of a moral or political theory where the imagination plays a key role in producing moral progress. In fact, as Kneller stressed, Kant may have been afraid of affirming the emancipatory powers of a symbolic imagination and its vital connection to a philosophical rationality that governs all judgments, including moral.

If Kant can argue that it is part of nature’s plan that humanity progress morally even through such “evils” as revolution, it would be plausible for him to hold that human imagination is equipped to “envision” this progress, that is, to exhibit it in the imaginative Ideal of a moral human community. That Kant did not hold this view need not be attributed to the requirement of either his moral or aesthetic theory but rather to the problematic nature of his views toward political authority. Too much imaginative freedom can threaten the established order, and true Enlightenment thinker he was, Kant could applaud Friedrich II’s imperative “Think for yourself” and quickly follow up with “But do as you are told.” (pp. 230–231).

It is Kant’s fear of the emancipatory potentials of the free and playful imagination, though, that I find both suggestive and seductive, even if I find his political double-talk to be incoherent and, unfortunately, typical. For this reason, it may be pragmatic and useful to keep Kant as a character in this developing discourse not because he articulated an explicit theory of the moral imagination—he didn’t—but instead because of his somewhat indirect acknowledgment of the imagination’s potentially disruptive power. In other words, Kant’s value derives from his sensibilities rather than his philosophy.

Plato and Kant shared a fundamental fear of the imagination as a force for social and political disruption and change, though they differed in whether they thought that change could potentially be progressive. Platonists are a camp that seek to “domesticate” the imagination by placing it under the control of mature and philosophical rationality. They recognize the power of the imagination and its potential to contribute to social and moral progress, but for the imagination’s contribution to be constructive, it needs to be rational and even philosophical. Kantians, on the other hand, are a camp that seeks to keep the imagination “wild,” operating within its own pristine and special territory. This is accomplished through the establishment of a special territory of the aesthetic where the rules and strictures of reason and rationality do not reign; but instead feelings, free association, and

playfulness are paramount. For the Kantians, the drivers of moral progress do not include the imagination and, as a result, the contemplation of the beautiful has little bearing on what will be considered right and good for society. There is no role for the imagination when it comes to the real work of society.

This is the fundamental debate that undergirds the uses and abuses of the imagination in business ethics moving forward: whether to be a Platonist or a Kantian. There will be Platonists who take the position that the imagination is fundamental to any conception of morality and, as such, must be accounted for as an explicit and central psychological mechanism for moral decision-making and moral progress. These scholars will embrace the constructive symbolic imagination where aspirational images of humanity and society both serve and guide decision-making in all conditions. Given the Platonists’ general reliance on the imagination, they will be prone to embrace and explicate domesticated or rationalized versions of the imagination.

In contrast, there will also be those who embrace my characterization of Kant, e.g., those that acknowledge the imagination as a potent force, but are skeptical of its ability to add value to decision-making in general and, instead, see its limited appeal relative to side conversations on topics that have little bearing on serious issues. These scholars envision a non-constructive calculative imagination, where the playful fantasies are so much the content of amusement within the boundaries of a pastime paradise. The imagination in the wild and undomesticated form makes an occasional appearance in their theories, but mostly as an example of what not to do and how not to think when it comes to questions of politics, morality, and justice.

## Conclusion

Philosophy... though it takes exertion, is the finest and most serious play. (Ferrari, 2007, p. 166).

The significance of Plato’s classification of the imagination in business ethics is that it provides a coherent and systematic model of decision-making and the attendant components of the psyche. It also clarifies the role of the imagination as a capacity of the psyche and its relationship to the psychic components. With an eye toward social justice, a final contribution of Plato’s theory is the idea of the symbolic imagination and the development of a philosophical rationality. In fact, as much as this study is about the imagination, one could also argue that it is equally about the development of philosophical rationality. This was extended in the discussion section by the exploration of the connection between rationality and imagination more generally. In the end, the constructive contribution of the imagination

depends on the actor having developed a philosophical rationality and, as a result, developed strong desires and passions that value justice.

Plato's theory of justice assumed that all humans have a natural inclination to take advantage of one another. This makes abuse of power common in a society that does not have the kind of intellectual traditions, training, and leadership specifically designed and cultivated to put a brake on the preponderance of abusive acts that derive from inequalities in the distribution of power. Though Plato's *Republic* was composed during the Classical Greek period, it was, in some ways, a reaction to the instability and tyranny many communities on the Aegean Peninsula felt during the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War. His ancient philosophy speaks to our contemporary moment. Organizational examples used in this study include several live cases sourced from American national media. The imagination, in its rationalized form, can serve as an engine of innovation and a vision of justice today as it has throughout history. Both the coherence and complexity of Plato's theory serve well as a newly rediscovered philosophical foundation for future discussion of the moral imagination in business ethics.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Ethical Approval** This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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ARTÍCULOS  
DE INVESTIGACIÓN

# Dialéctica del esclavo en las *Leyes* de Platón\*

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**Resumen:** La aceptación de la esclavitud es una de las cuestiones donde la Antigüedad muestra un mayor rezago en relación con el mundo contemporáneo; esto suele aducirse para criticar la filosofía griega. En este artículo se examina hasta qué punto el pensamiento de Platón en las *Leyes* puede caer bajo esta imputación o sustraerse a ella. Se plantea que en el autor se encuentra una dialéctica del esclavo, que consiste en mantener, por un lado, la función de la esclavitud dentro de la estructura social y política propuesta, mientras que, por el otro lado, se cuestiona la existencia del esclavo como tal. Así, se hace primero una presentación general de la esclavitud en las *Leyes* y de la función que dicha institución cumple en la comprensión filosófica del propio diálogo y, después, se adelanta un examen detenido del pasaje central de 6.777d5-7. Se concluye que si bien, en clave histórica, Platón no logra eludir la tensión de esta dialéctica, en clave filosófica ofrece su resolución en el obrar del hombre verdaderamente justo.

**Palabras clave:** Platón, *Leyes*, esclavitud, relaciones de poder, Grecia Antigua

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# Dialectic of the slave in the *Laws* of Plato

**Abstract:** The acceptance of slavery is one of the issues where Antiquity shows a greater lag in relation to the contemporary world; this is often adduced to criticize Greek philosophy. This paper examines the extent to which Plato's thought in *Laws* can fall under or escape this imputation. It is suggested that we can find in the author a dialectic of the slave, which consists in maintaining, on the one hand, the function of slavery within the proposed social and political structure, while, on the other hand, the existence of the slave as such is questioned. Thus, it is first made a general presentation of slavery in the *Laws* and of the role that this institution plays in the philosophical understanding of the dialogue itself, and then a careful examination of the central passage of 6.777d5-7 is carried out. It is concluded that although, in a historical key, Plato fails to avoid the tension of this dialectic, in a philosophical key he offers its resolution in the doings of the truly just person.

**Key words:** Plato, *Laws*, slavery, power relations, Ancient Greece

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Trabaja en el pensamiento de Platón, dentro de un abordaje dramático de los diálogos y con particular atención a sus fuentes literarias. Como producto de ello ha publicado diversos artículos y el libro *Platón y Homero: Diálogo entre filosofía y poesía* (2019).

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Para William H. F. Altman

Amigo

## Introducción

En las *Leyes*, la obra más larga de Platón, tres ancianos dialogan sobre la legislación que regirá en Magnesia, una ciudad que va a fundarse dentro de un plazo de tiempo no especificado. La conversación se da en el día más largo del año, mientras los tres hombres se dirigen de Cnosos a la gruta de Zeus, en el monte Ida. Los tres interlocutores son un extranjero ateniense, que es quien guía el diálogo, y dos dorios, uno cretense, Clinias, y uno lacedemonio, Megilo. El intercambio avanza en conformidad con el largo camino y, poco a poco, va tomando forma el conjunto normativo que regirá a los magnesios. Se trata, en efecto, del establecimiento de leyes que rijan todos los aspectos de la vida de sus habitantes, de la concepción a la muerte, con capítulos que cubren los asuntos esenciales de cualquier comunidad humana, como la localización geográfica y la disposición arquitectónica; el tipo de Estado que se propone y su forma de gobierno; las instituciones que lo constituyen, incluidas las magistraturas y la familia; la educación, el culto y la economía; los códigos penales, civiles y comerciales; los principios rectores de la administración del Estado. Se trata de una obra comprehensiva, ambiciosa, de exigente lectura e interpretación.

Dentro de este amplio marco institucional, es natural que los esclavos hagan su aparición en las diferentes funciones que se les asignan, en un tratamiento áspero e incluso cruel, pero también considerado y justo, como se verá. Esta dialéctica en la consideración del esclavo en el diálogo las *Leyes* da pie a la presente reflexión. Suele señalarse, en efecto, que los grandes filósofos de la antigüedad griega manifestaron una inadmisible actitud de aceptación y respaldo hacia la execrable institución de la esclavitud, lo cual, a pesar de todos sus demás méritos, no deja de ser una mácula de su obra y llega incluso a comprometer el sentido general de su pensamiento. Frente a dicha posición, compartida por la mayoría de los intérpretes, se propone aquí, a partir de la dialéctica indicada, que, si bien Platón se halla preso de los compromisos históricos, sociales y políticos de su época, alcanza a entrever en la figura del esclavo una prueba crucial de su propia comprensión de la virtud, en particular de la justicia, como meta del ejercicio de la filosofía. Así, se examina en un primer momento el conjunto de disposiciones que en este amplio diálogo se establecen en relación con los esclavos; los resultados de este examen no difieren mayormente de la posición interpretativa común, salvo en un punto esencial, a saber, que la diferencia entre libertad y esclavitud se utiliza como modelo para la comprensión filosófica del propio diálogo. Se apunta con ello a que la tarea filosófica debe poder cumplirse en el espacio de la libertad, por lo cual cabe esperar una reflexión donde se ponga en cuestión la existencia de la esclavitud. Esta tarea se adelanta en la segunda parte, donde se examina uno de los pasajes

decisivos de todo el corpus platónico, [Leyes 6.776b5-778a4](#), tomando distancia en ello de la mayoría de las lecturas que se han hecho de este texto, con el fin de identificar ahí la clave de resolución de la dialéctica planteada.<sup>1</sup> En la conclusión se reconoce la vigencia que mantiene este admirable pasaje platónico en el mundo contemporáneo.

## 1. La esclavitud en las *Leyes*

A diferencia de lo que ocurre en el conjunto de los demás diálogos, en las *Leyes* la esclavitud es tema constante de discusión.<sup>2</sup> En efecto, en la ciudad que se construye en este diálogo, Magnesia, es claro el sitio que ocupan los esclavos dentro de la organización social, cuáles son sus tareas, sus deberes, los castigos que reciben por el incumplimiento de los mismos, y los poquísimos derechos que tienen.<sup>3</sup> En un repaso del conjunto de las normas al respecto, cabe hacer las siguientes anotaciones. En un primer momento, dado el importante lugar que cumplen los coros en el proceso educativo y en la vida de la ciudad, a los esclavos y a los extranjeros se les encomienda la representación de piezas cómicas, ridículas y vergonzosas ([7.816e](#)), norma que se inscribe dentro de la disposición general que distingue los temas propios para el aprendizaje de los libres y los pocos y serviles correspondientes a los esclavos ([7.817e](#)). También son esclavos públicos los encargados de administrar los castigos a esclavos y extranjeros ([7.794b](#)), en una cierta tendencia a equiparar ambos grupos ([6.764b](#)). Hay, como era usual en las ciudades griegas, leyes para la manumisión de esclavos ([11.914e-915c](#)), liberación que si bien nunca será total, sí puede ser lo suficientemente amplia como para que un liberto alcance a formar una pequeña fortuna. En otros casos, el esclavo tiene el mismo tratamiento que un niño, como cuando rinde testimonio en un juicio ([11.937b](#)), aunque, al igual que los ciudadanos libres, está obligado a colaborar en las investigaciones judiciales, recibiendo castigo en caso de no hacerlo ([9.881b-c](#)). Valga decir que los castigos para los esclavos se diferencian por categorías, según la índole de la falta cometida, si se trata de un robo ([8.845a](#)) o de otro daño civil ([11.936c-d](#)); de un modo característico, el esclavo o extranjero que hurte algo público debe pagar una multa, “en la convicción de que se trata de alguien que, con probabilidad, puede reformarse”, mientras que un ciudadano deberá recibir la pena suprema ([12.941d-942a](#)). También

1 En general, en la presente reflexión no va a diferenciarse entre ‘esclavo’ y ‘esclavitud’; en el diálogo se habla más propiamente de esclavo, que teóricamente aquí se asume como esclavitud. Las *Leyes* se citan según Platón (1999). En la segunda parte, en el análisis del pasaje central, se indicarán las líneas, según England (1921), dado que aquí se procede paso a paso, con el mayor cuidado, lo que también hará conveniente la transliteración de algunos términos del griego, siempre con traducción.

2 Morrow (1993, p. 148): “A Greek city without slaves was almost unknown in Plato’s day, hence we should not be surprised that they are taken for granted in the *Laws* and figure constantly in the details of Plato’s scheme”.

3 Prauscello (2014, p. 22): “To modern sensitivities there is an obvious elephant in the room in this utopian model of citizenship: slaves”. En su estudio, la autora busca responder en alguna medida a esta anomalía, mediante la indagación del servicio que los esclavos prestan en los coros (pp. 59-68).



se diferencian los castigos cuando se trata de faltas de carácter penal, como agresión simple (9.882a), homicidio en defensa propia (8.869d), homicidio alevé (8.868a-b). Los castigos que en general reciben los esclavos son durísimos y excesivos, quizás un poco con la idea espartana de mantener a raya a todo un pueblo de esclavos incrustado dentro de la ciudad.<sup>4</sup> Es fundamental, sin embargo, tener la disposición para entender estos diferentes artículos de los códigos civil y penal dentro del marco conformado por la dialéctica del esclavo, que constituye el centro irradiador de esta reflexión. Podrían enumerarse otros casos de normas sobre los esclavos en el diálogo, pero las mencionadas son las principales y dan una buena idea del lugar que se les asigna dentro del orden político y social. En una primera conclusión puede decirse que el esclavo no se considera como un ser inferior ni física ni intelectualmente, sino como alguien sometido políticamente, privado de derechos, pero no de responsabilidades en aquello que le compete.

Para tener una noción más cercana de lo que significa ser esclavo en las *Leyes*, conviene revisar un pasaje que no es normativo, sino descriptivo y comparativo. En este texto (4.719e7-720e9), el ateniense traza una comparación entre los preámbulos de las leyes y los hombres libres, por un lado, y entre las leyes en sentido estricto y los esclavos, por el otro lado. La cuestión es que en la antigua Atenas había, aparte de los médicos libres, médicos esclavos, con una división muy clara del trabajo, pues aquellos trataban a individuos libres, mientras que estos lo hacían con esclavos, siendo muy diferente el modo de proceder de unos y otros. Ninguno de los médicos esclavos, dice el ateniense,

da ni admite ninguna explicación sobre ninguna de las enfermedades de ninguno de los esclavos, sino que ordena lo que le parece por experiencia, como si supiera exactamente, con obstinación, como un tirano, y se marcha, saltando a otro esclavo enfermo (4.720c4-7).

Este pasaje deja traslucir algunas características del actuar del esclavo, que, aunque en este caso sea médico, obra como corresponde a un esclavo, es decir, según el parecer que su experiencia le indica, de modo directo y franco, sin consideraciones de ningún tipo, ni respecto de sí mismo, ni en relación con aquel a quien atiende, que, siendo también esclavo, recibe las indicaciones en el mismo tono, ateniéndose a lo que se le dice, sin preguntar, sin cuestionar nada. Este proceder contrasta con el del médico libre, que

trata y vigila por lo general las enfermedades de los libres, estudiándolas desde su surgimiento y de acuerdo con su naturaleza. Mientras comparte el tratamiento con el enfermo y sus seres queridos, aprende algo de los pacientes y también, en

4 Puesto que los esclavos serían los trabajadores del campo (7.806d-e); Morrow (1939), Saunders (1991).

la medida de lo posible, lo instruye. No prescribe nada sin haberlo convencido antes por algún medio y, solo entonces, cuando lo ha tranquilizado por medio de la persuasión lleva a cabo el restablecimiento de la salud (4.720d1-e2).

Así, la forma como el libre obra con quien es libre va guiada por el conocimiento preciso de aquello que los vincula —en este caso, la enfermedad—, lo que le permite establecer con el paciente y sus seres queridos un tratamiento que se da en el medio del conocimiento mutuo, gracias a lo cual ofrece sus indicaciones en el seno de la persuasión, lo que tranquiliza al paciente y lo pone en la vía de la recuperación de la salud.

Las diferencias principales entre los modos de actuar del libre y del esclavo consisten, primero, en el conocimiento de la condición, que es científica en el caso del libre, pero solo empírica en el del esclavo; segundo, en la relación entre el médico y el paciente, que es dialogal, amistosa y amplia en el caso del libre, pero no dialogal, autoritaria y limitada en el del esclavo; tercero, en la solución, que es persuasiva y tranquilizadora en el caso del libre, pero impuesta e indiferente en el del esclavo. Los interlocutores del diálogo concuerdan sin dificultad en que el proceder doble es mejor, “con mucha diferencia” (4.720e6), y que precisamente por ello ha de aplicarse también en el caso de la legislación, donde la ley se distingue del preámbulo de la ley:

La orden tiránica, que en la exposición asemejamos a las órdenes de los médicos que denominamos serviles, es la ley pura, mientras que lo dicho antes de ella, lo llamado por el que habla elemento persuasivo, si bien realmente es para convencer, tiene la función de la introducción en el caso de los discursos. Pues para que aquel al que el legislador dicta la ley reciba con buena disposición —y por la buena disposición sea más capaz de aprender— lo que de veras es la ley, la orden, me parece que se ha dicho todo ese discurso que el que habla dijo con la finalidad de convencer (4.722e7-723a7).

Por supuesto que las leyes se dictan para todos, libres y esclavos, pero precisamente los libres deben recibir, antes de la expedición de la ley, un discurso convincente sobre la necesidad, el sentido y el alcance de la ley, de modo tal que sea por la convicción así ganada que el ciudadano se resuelve al cumplimiento de la ley y no por la coacción formal que impone la ley promulgada. La ley, en sentido amplio, comprende el preámbulo y la ley en sentido estricto, lo que en el texto se denomina la ley pura; el ciudadano libre, justamente por ser libre, se acogerá libremente a la ley, esto es, se orientará hacia ella por la convicción ganada en el preámbulo, mientras que si la obedece meramente por la fuerza de la ley, aunque sea libre, estará obrando de un modo servil. Las leyes de obligatorio cumplimiento se expiden, pues, si bien no para esclavos, sí para aquella parte servil de la naturaleza humana. Pero, en el diálogo *Leyes*, en su conjunto, la ley no se entiende principalmente en este sentido coactivo y tiránico, sino en sentido persuasivo y libre. La esclavitud tiene, pues, un alcance más amplio que el simple sentido político y social, pues todo ser humano ha de esforzarse por ser libre de esa

parte servil que habita en él. A partir de esta constatación, puede entenderse incluso que la existencia política y social de la esclavitud procede de la exacerbación de esta dimensión que ocupa también el alma humana.

Como llamado inequívoco y claro a obrar con libertad, las *Leyes* es, pues, un diálogo plenamente filosófico. Así lo confirmará el propio ateniense cuando retome esta comparación de los dos modelos de médico con el fin de ofrecer una caracterización de la filosofía:

Pues hay que saber bien que, si algún médico de los que practican la medicina empíricamente sin conocimiento teórico alguna vez se topara con un médico que dialoga con un hombre libre enfermo, que hace discursos que están cerca de la filosofía y que trata la enfermedad a partir de su origen, disertando sobre toda la naturaleza de los cuerpos, al punto se desternillaría de risa y no diría otras palabras que las que siempre tienen a mano en tal tema la mayoría de los llamados médicos. En efecto, diría: 'Pero tonto, no curas al enfermo, sino que prácticamente lo educas como si necesitara hacerse médico y no sanarse' (9.857c6-e1).

Allí, pues, donde en libertad se ejercite el diálogo, se indague la naturaleza del asunto que lo convoca, se ofrezcan vías para salir de la aporía desde su principio, se estará próximo a la filosofía,<sup>5</sup> pero no hay que esperar entendimiento o comprensión hacia este proceder de parte de quien suele obrar de modo tiránico, sin conocimiento teórico y buscando una mera eficacia técnica.

## 2. Dialéctica del esclavo en las *Leyes*

Se ha visto, pues, que en las *Leyes* la esclavitud puede entenderse en dos sentidos. Se da, en primer lugar, el propiamente institucional, en lo que la obra se adecúa a las circunstancias históricas y políticas de la época, con la diferencia que se establece entre hombres libres y esclavos, estricta, pero no absoluta. Pero, en segundo lugar, en la diferencia entre libertad y esclavitud puede identificarse también una decisión filosófica, que abarca el conjunto del diálogo en cuanto tal, ya que si bien este se dirige a hombres libres, que obran en consonancia con dicha libertad, no puede prescindir por completo de un recurso coactivo, dado cierto aspecto servil de la naturaleza humana. Así, en esta mirada general de la esclavitud en las *Leyes* puede distinguirse un aspecto político de la misma, que viene entonces determinada por normas administrativas, y una comprensión amplia, propiamente filosófica, donde la esclavitud se contrapone a la libertad, que es el ámbito propio de la educación y la actuación del ser humano,

5 La relevancia de este pasaje se muestra en que es uno de los dos donde aparece en las *Leyes* la palabra 'filosofía' o 'filosofar'; el otro se encuentra en 12.967c.

cuya formación constituye la meta última del diálogo. Es del mayor interés que esta dialéctica de la esclavitud pueda rastrearse en un pasaje determinado cerca de la mitad del diálogo.

Antes de ofrecer la lectura que se propone de este complejo texto, puede hacerse una primera mención de algunas influyentes propuestas interpretativas del mismo, de modo que después pueda apreciarse la distancia que aquí se toma de ellas. Knoll (2013) representa bien el punto de vista que ha devenido “canónico” respecto del esclavo en las *Leyes*. Este autor indica, en primer lugar, que Platón nunca puso en tela de juicio la distinción corriente en la Antigüedad entre el señor y el esclavo; al contrario, sostiene, la describe como “necesaria” (sus comillas). Platón, señala Knoll, ve al esclavo fundamentalmente como una forma de posesión y exige que en lo posible se disponga de esclavos en número suficiente y aptos para el trabajo. Según él, los dos modos que Platón presenta de tratar a los esclavos corresponden a opiniones y experiencias ampliamente difundidas en su época. Así, se encuentran, por un lado, los que le hacen bien a su señor, son virtuosos y fáciles de tratar, mientras que, por el otro lado, hay esclavos cuyas almas torcidas hacen que sea imposible confiar en ellos, por lo que deben ser tratados como animales y domados, de modo que se hundan aun más en su condición de esclavitud. Tal como Aristóteles, estima Knoll, Platón está convencido de que los esclavos, a diferencia de los libres, tienen una deficiencia racional (4.720a-e; cf. Aristóteles, *Pol.* 1252a32; 1254b22s; 1260a12). De aquí se sigue la respuesta de Platón sobre el modo correcto de tratar a los esclavos: no se los puede consentir, ni tratar como a hombres libres, con exhortaciones y reprensiones, sino con castigos, según los merezcan; hay que dirigirse a ellos con órdenes, sin bromas y sin injusticia. Así, subraya este intérprete, por medio de un comportamiento moralmente intachable hacia ellos, puede con la mayor probabilidad sembrarse en ellos la semilla de la virtud (6.777d-e). En su conclusión, este comentarista sostiene que para Platón el esclavo es una posesión como cualquier otra, que bien tratada produce beneficios para el señor. Para Schöpsdau (2003), el ateniense no está interesado en ofrecer una definición fundamental y una fundamentación del estatus del esclavo, sino que tan solo se interesa por la pregunta práctica de cómo deben tratarse los esclavos, pregunta que se formula en cuatro ocasiones (776b7-8, 776d3, 777b1-3, 777c6-7). La respuesta que ofrece el ateniense es difícil, estima Schöpsdau, puesto que respecto de los esclavos se tienen experiencias diferentes y opiniones correspondientemente contrarias sobre cómo proceder con ellos. Empero, subraya el comentarista, el correcto manejo de los esclavos no tiene solamente un mero aspecto de utilidad (777d5-7), sino que alberga también una dimensión ética, pero la “virtud” (sus comillas) que se suscita en el trato entre el señor y el siervo es benéfica solamente para el primero. En su lectura, este intérprete combina pasajes que, como se verá, pertenecen a líneas argumentativas diferentes. Un enfoque parecido sigue Prauscello (2014), para quien el señor educa al siervo en la virtud dentro del espacio doméstico, *oïkos*, y en su relación personal, lo que tiene lugar sobre todo en beneficio del señor. Annas (2010) es más dura aún, pues

estima que Platón no se preocupa en mayor medida por consideraciones humanitarias acerca del esclavo; a él solo le interesa que el señor no vaya a echar a perder su propio carácter por abusar de su autoridad o evadirla de algún modo. En su apreciación, la comentarista se encuentra cerca de Stalley (1983), que se muestra impactado por la falta de un sentimiento humanitario en el tratamiento que Platón hace de la esclavitud, sin que la comunidad de naturaleza humana entre el señor y el siervo sirva para crear ningún tipo de respeto o simpatía hacia este último. Puede decirse, en suma, que estas posiciones representan bien el enfoque que Platón le da a la esclavitud en las *Leyes* y la valoración que hace de ella. Frente a este consenso en un punto tan delicado, aquí se asume una línea interpretativa diferente.

En el conjunto de las regulaciones sobre la vida doméstica, justo tras haberse hablado de la generación de los hijos (6.776b2-4),<sup>6</sup> el extranjero ateniense introduce con tono adusto el asunto de que va a ocuparse ahora: “Lo que viene a continuación es la cuestión siguiente” (6.776b5), señala inequívoca de la gravedad de lo que viene. “¿Con qué posesiones tendría uno la fortuna (*ousía*) más adecuada?” (6.776b5-6), se pregunta, aun tanteando el terreno. Nótese, por cierto, que aquí va a tratarse de algo más que de la administración de un bien o conjunto de bienes —‘fortuna’: *ousía*—, pues el desarrollo del argumento va a mostrar con toda claridad que lo que está en juego es nada menos que la esencia (*ousía*) del alma misma que posee esos bienes (Flórez, 2012). En otras palabras, aquí va a hablarse de un bien de fortuna (*ousía*) frente al cual su poseedor va a mostrar su verdadera esencia (*ousía*).

En efecto, comienza a responder el ateniense, “no es difícil hacerse una idea de la mayoría de las cosas ni tampoco poseerlas” (6.776b6-7), con lo que fija el terreno común de los bienes muebles e inmuebles, sobre los que pueden trazarse lineamientos claros de posesión, usufructo y pérdida, con independencia de lo entregada que esté un alma a dichos bienes, lo que es un asunto diferente. Sin embargo, agrega, entrando de lleno en la dificultad, “en el caso de los esclavos es difícil desde todo punto de vista (*khalepà pántei*)” (6.776b7-8). Entonces, ya desde su misma presentación, el ateniense reconoce en la esclavitud una cuestión intrínsecamente problemática;<sup>7</sup> como él dice, “difícil desde todo punto de vista”. No cabe esperar, pues, una resolución de la cuestión de la esclavitud desde la perspectiva de la posesión de los bienes, pues no la tiene, por

6 La expresión “mientras transmiten la vida unos a otros, como una antorcha” (6.776b3-4) está cercana a la de la famosa carrera de la *República*: “Y Adimanto añadió: —¿No sabéis acaso que al atardecer habrá una carrera de antorchas a caballo en honor de la diosa? —¿A caballo? —dije yo—. Eso es cosa nueva. ¿Es que se pasarán unos a otros las antorchas corriendo montados? ¿O cómo se entiende?” (*República* 1.327c-328a). Si el diálogo nocturno de la *República* es la verdadera carrera de antorchas de que aquí se habla, la transmisión de la luz filosófica se asemeja al nacimiento de una nueva generación, según las *Leyes*. Este diálogo podría, entonces, entenderse como una especie de cuna de la filosofía.

7 Aquí se sigue a England, que en las notas a su edición del diálogo señala que la dificultad del pasaje se relaciona con la dificultad de su tema, la posesión de esclavos: “Our very language about slaves is inconsistent, and our experience shows a similar diversity and contradiction” (England, 1921, p. 617). Por su parte, en las notas a su traducción, Brisson y Pradeau consideran que se trata de una simple cuestión de tasación: “Parce qu’il est difficile d’estimer la valeur de serviteurs en argent” (Platón, 2006, T. 1, p. 420, n. 151).

lo que el abordaje va a cambiar de enfoque y va a dirigirse al alma de quien “posee” este “bien”.

Sin amilanarse, el ateniense identifica como causa de esta gran dificultad el hecho de que “en cierto sentido, decimos cosas incorrectas de ellos y, sin embargo, en otro [sentido] tenemos razón” (6.776c1-2). Antes de entrar en las razones que aduce el ateniense, hay que darle toda la fuerza a esta polaridad dialéctica. En primer lugar, nuestra expresión en relación con los esclavos es incorrecta, pero, también, es correcta. ¿Por qué nuestra expresión es incorrecta y correcta a la vez cuando hablamos de los esclavos? El hecho de haber reconocido y formulado esta dialéctica respecto del esclavo conforma uno de los signos indelebles de la grandeza del pensador ateniense. El ateniense —que en este punto puede identificarse como la voz del propio Platón<sup>8</sup>— comienza a esclarecer lo que ha querido decir: “En efecto, en parte hacemos nuestros discursos sobre los esclavos de manera contraria a como los utilizamos, y también en parte en conformidad con el uso que hacemos de ellos” (6.776c2-3, ligeramente modificada). La contradicción reside, pues, en que el discurso sobre el esclavo, por una parte, no se compagina con el uso que se hace del esclavo, pero también, por otra parte, sí se adecúa a dicho uso. El discurso sobre el esclavo es, pues, necesariamente contradictorio, ya que a veces va en contra de la utilidad que se saca del esclavo y a veces está en conformidad con ella. No se trata, entonces, de una mera contradicción empírica en el uso del esclavo, que sería útil a veces, y a veces, no. La contradicción a la que aquí se apunta es fundamental e inerradicable, pues se aloja en la formulación misma del problema de la esclavitud. Se habla aquí de una meta-contradicción, es decir, de una contradicción necesaria entre enunciados contradictorios entre sí, lo que viene a significar que del esclavo no puede hablarse sin caer en una contradicción intrínseca, a saber, que, por un lado, se habla de ellos de manera contraria a como se utilizan, mientras que, por el otro lado, se habla de ellos en conformidad con la utilización que se les da. Se dice, así, que es buen esclavo, si se usa mal, pero también se dice que es mal esclavo, si se usa bien.

No es sorprendente que, ante esta declaración tajante sobre la contradicción ínsita a la condición del esclavo, el espartano Megilo ofrezca una réplica inmediata, toda vez que en Esparta las relaciones de los espartanos libres con los ilotas esclavos eran mucho más radicales que en cualquier otro lugar de Grecia. Sin dar crédito a lo que oye, exclama: “¿A qué te refieres? Porque aún no comprendemos, extranjero, lo que ahora quieres indicar” (6.776c4-5). En el plural que utiliza Megilo incluye al cretense Clinias, dorio como Megilo, que todavía tendrá que presentar su opinión en este contencioso, pero el plural quizás también indique que los espartanos en general no se hallan tan

8 “The single most important question facing every reader of *Laws* is as simple to ask as it is difficult to answer: Who is the Athenian Stranger?” (Altman, 2016, p. 231). Tomar posición frente a esta pregunta es expresar ya un compromiso interpretativo fundamental, que en este caso difiere del de Altman.

dispuestos a aceptar las observaciones del ateniense. Este, con cierta ironía, reconoce que él, Megilo, por supuesto no puede entender de qué se trata aquí: “Y con mucha razón, Megilo” (6.776c6), le responde, y pasa a explicarle que el sistema lacedemonio de servidumbre “produciría la mayor estupefacción (*aporían*) en prácticamente toda Grecia y sería el origen de disputa (*érin*), pues para unos sería bueno, mientras que para otros, no” (6.776c6-9). La organización esclavista espartana, extrema incluso para los usos de la Antigüedad, opera aquí como índice de confirmación de la contradicción dialéctica inherente a la esclavitud. Esta misma inaceptabilidad del esclavismo espartano, con su carácter aporético y erístico, amenaza ahora, en otro plano del discurso, el propio intercambio dialogal que se está dando entre ellos mismos.

Esta coyuntura señala el momento para plantear con toda claridad la cuestión fundamental respecto de la esclavitud. Así lo hace sin más dilaciones el ateniense: “Considerando todas estas cosas, ¿qué debemos hacer (*tí khrè poieîn*) con la posesión de esclavos?” (6.776d2-3). La pregunta que formula el ateniense se sigue de la constatación dialéctica que se ha hecho respecto de la esclavitud, por lo que es de índole fundamentalmente ética, no empírica, es decir, no se está indagando por una ocupación o proyecto donde pudieran emplearse los esclavos, sino que se apunta a la cuestión misma de la posesión de esclavos en cuanto tal: ¿qué debemos hacer? (*tí khrè poieîn*). En los dos pasajes subsiguientes, el ateniense ofrece elementos adicionales como para que no quede duda de que aquí se trata de una argumentación dialéctica. En efecto, indica, por un lado, se encuentra el testimonio acerca de muchos esclavos que para algunos llegaron a ser “más virtuosos que los hermanos e hijos y han salvado a sus amos, sus posesiones y sus viviendas enteras” (6.776d7-e1), mientras que, por el otro lado, se halla la observación según la cual “el alma esclava no tiene nada sano” (6.776e4), sentencia que respalda “el más sabio de nuestros poetas” (6.776e6), para lo cual aduce el pasaje de Homero, donde Eumeo, pensando que quizás Odiseo no regresa por haber sido esclavizado, indica que Zeus despoja de la mitad de la inteligencia (*nóou*) a aquellos hombres a los que alcanza la esclavitud: “el tonante arrebató al varón la mitad de su fuerza (*aretês*) / desde el día que en él hace presa la vil servidumbre” (*Odisea* 17.322-323). Nótese que en cada una de estas dos opciones alternativas la posesión de esclavos se basa en un principio diferente: en la primera, se funda en la virtud; en la segunda, en la inteligencia (en este caso, en la carencia de inteligencia). La primera opción se defiende con testimonios históricos que todos conocen, mientras que la segunda se respalda en aquello que se dice, que deriva en últimas de un pasaje de Homero, quizás glosado aquí de propósito.<sup>9</sup> De este modo, puntualiza el ateniense,

9 El texto de la vulgata habla de ‘virtud’ (*aretês*), no de ‘inteligencia’ (*nóou*), que es la lectura platónica. England (1921, p. 618) estima que esta variante platónica es más homérica que la de la vulgata, para lo cual remite a *Odisea* 1.3; Labarbe (1949, pp. 249-254) concluye que con mucha probabilidad ambas variantes derivan de la tradición homérica corriente en tiempo de Platón, es decir, que la lectura platónica no se debería a una glosa de mano propia; Lohse (1965, pp. 289-292) considera que Platón ha introducido de propósito la variante para que se conforme al contexto del argumento que se viene desarrollando en las *Leyes*, en el sentido



“con sus razonamientos, cada uno saca diferentes conclusiones y los unos no confían para nada en la raza de los esclavos [...] pero otros hacen todo lo contrario de eso” (6.777a3-4...777a6-7). Se cierra así el intercambio entre el ateniense y Megilo, pues este concede la razón al ateniense; “en efecto” (6.777a8), concluye, reconociendo así la condición inherentemente dialéctica de la posesión de esclavos. En todo caso, hay que hacer notar en este punto que los interlocutores que se proponen la fundación de la ciudad se encuentran ya ante una situación aporética respecto de la condición de los esclavos, pues se da tanto el partido de quienes están a su favor, aduciendo conductas virtuosas, como el de quienes están en su contra, remitiéndose a argumentos poéticos, de dudoso valor quizás.

Ante la determinación aporética y erística de la esclavitud, el cretense Clinias, a quien se le ha encomendado la fundación de la nueva ciudad de Magnesia, pide el auxilio de su interlocutor ático: “Entonces, extranjero, en el caso de nuestro país, ¿qué debemos hacer, si hay tantas diferencias, con la posesión y el castigo de los esclavos?” (6.777b1-3). Clinias, por supuesto, piensa como político, no ha captado en absoluto la intrínseca dificultad del problema y solo quiere que se le ofrezcan salidas viables para la posesión de los esclavos y su castigo. El ateniense orienta, entonces, su discurso en sentido antropológico, ámbito en el cual la dialéctica del esclavo se presentará de nuevo, pero que quizás le ofrezca al cretense aspectos más concretos por los cuales guiarse. El ateniense parte de una formulación sorprendente:

Y bien, Clinias, es evidente que, puesto que el hombre es un animal arisco (*dúskolon*), no parece querer ser ni llegar a ser en absoluto útil para esta diferenciación inevitable (*anagkaían*), la distinción en la realidad (*te érgoi*) entre esclavo, hombre libre y amo, una pertenencia (*ktêma*) difícil (*khalepón*), sin duda (6.777b4-c1).

La calificación de ‘arisco’ (*dúskolos*) para el ser humano (1.649e2) significa que no es fácil de complacer ni de dirigir, que es descontentadizo, malhumorado, irritable, por lo que de ningún modo va a querer ajustarse ni ahora ni en el futuro a la inevitable diferencia que se da de hecho entre un esclavo y un libre, todo lo cual hace que se trate de una posesión de difícil manejo. No hay, según esta declaración, una distinción entre tipos de seres humanos que harían que uno fuera por naturaleza esclavo, y otro, libre; tampoco hay en el ser humano una propensión a la esclavitud, todo lo contrario: por naturaleza, esto es, como un animal, el ser humano tiende a la autonomía, a la autodeterminación, lleva mal cualquier clase de imposición que se le haga, lo cual se afirma así de todos los

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de una deficiencia intelectual del esclavo; Schöpsdau (2003, pp. 468-469) parece compartir la opinión de Lohse, pero añade, extemporáneamente, que la versión de la vulgata, con su referencia a la virtud, habría encajado también con el texto platónico de 776d8, donde se habla de “esclavos más virtuosos que hermanos e hijos”, argumento imposible, puesto que este pasaje corresponde a la primera rama de la alternativa, mientras que el texto homérico se cita en apoyo de la segunda. En su edición crítica de la *Odisea*, West (2017) mantiene la lectura de la vulgata.

seres humanos, ahora y siempre, sin ningún tipo de distinción o salvedad. *El ser humano es libre por naturaleza*. Ahora bien, con este universalismo antropológico chocan otras determinaciones que, de hecho (*te érgoi*), se dan en actividades e instituciones humanas, determinaciones necesarias que establecen la distinción entre el esclavo y el libre. Si bien esta distinción es inevitable, no se da ni puede darse por principio; con toda su inevitabilidad, se trata de una mera cuestión de hecho. La distinción entre espartanos e ilotas muestra bien a qué hace referencia el ateniense, en atención a sus interlocutores dorios, pues los ilotas eran un pueblo libre antes de ser vencidos y sometidos por los espartanos, quedando así reducidos a la condición de pueblo esclavo.<sup>10</sup> Ahora la contradicción dialéctica queda patente, pues la esclavitud no es una condición propia de la naturaleza humana, sino el resultado inevitable de un suceso político y militar. Por eso, así se trate de una posesión (*ktêma*), como derecho de conquista, un ser humano es y será siempre una posesión difícil (*khalepós*), donde hay que reconocer en este adjetivo un uso calculadamente platónico, que apunta a una dificultad remontable en principio por medio de la dialéctica.<sup>11</sup> El ateniense procede a dar un par de ejemplos históricos de la dificultad que significa la posesión de esclavos, alguno de ellos discretamente alusivo a los propios espartanos, y concluye, contra las expectativas de Clinias, sin poderle dar una receta al administrador político: “Si uno considera todo esto, no sabría qué hacer en todos los casos de esa índole” (6.777c6-7). Esta oración quizás podría, si no traducirse, al menos verse como: “Si uno viera todo esto (*pròs ha tis an panta blépsas*), le sería una aporía (*diaporéseie*) qué debe hacer (*tí khèrè drân*) en relación con todos los casos así (*peri hapánton tôn toioúton*)”, para mostrar de manera más explícita la aporía en que cae la pregunta ética fundamental: ‘¿qué debe hacerse?’, cuando se la sitúa dentro del marco de las prácticas históricas respecto de la esclavitud. El Ateniense —y Platón, con él— cae inevitablemente en esta aporía.

Pero, reuniendo bríos, el ateniense no se da por vencido y estima que aun puede ofrecer una respuesta, ya que no histórico-política, sí ciertamente filosófica, a la cuestión de la esclavitud. “Nos quedan solo dos medios (*dúo dè leípesthon móno mekhaná*)”, anuncia, para afrontar esta dificultad —y resolver la dialéctica del esclavo—: “que los que van a servir sin crear dificultades no sean compatriotas ni hablen en lo posible la misma lengua y que los tengan bien, no solo por los esclavos, sino más bien por sí mismos” (6.777c7-d3). El primer medio para que los esclavos sobrelleven su condición sin apremios es una solución que el administrador político Clinias acogería de grado: que entre sí los esclavos sean de pueblos diferentes y hablen lenguas distintas. De este modo, no podrán constituir entidades mayores y ordenadas que representen un peligro para la ciudad. Reflexionando a la inversa, pueden reconocerse en esta

10 Morrow explica con claridad que en las *Leyes* no se propone de ningún modo la constitución de una clase de esclavos: “Plato does not intend his agricultural slaves to constitute a class of serfs analogous to the Helots” (1993, p. 151).

11 Mintz (2010) estudia el sentido de esta expresión en los diálogos de Platón. La expresión “lo bello es difícil” (*khalepà tà kalá*) aparece en *República* 4.435c, *Crátilo* 384b, *Hipias Mayor* 304e.

formulación dos condiciones esenciales para el ejercicio político pleno, libre: pertenecer a la ciudad, es decir, la ciudadanía, y poder expresarse en ella, es decir, la libertad de expresión. Si estas condiciones se coartan, ya que no pueden suprimirse de la naturaleza humana, un grupo de esclavos nunca podrán conformar un pueblo, ni representarán un problema político para la ciudad. Es interesante que el ateniense entienda que las dos condiciones mencionadas, ciudadanía y libertad de expresión, son suficientes de suyo para la realización del ejercicio político, por lo que impedir que un grupo de individuos se constituya como unidad política se propone como la primera vía para dar respuesta a la pregunta sobre qué debe hacerse con los esclavos. Aquí habría podido detenerse la reflexión del ateniense, Clinias habría quedado complacido, y la dialéctica del esclavo se habría entendido como irresoluble históricamente, si bien no anclada en la naturaleza humana, sino dependiente de estructuras políticas. Pero, contra lo que muchos quisieran que fuera verdad, Platón no es amigo de soluciones administrativas para problemas filosóficos, y por eso el ateniense anuncia desde el comienzo que quedan *solo* dos medios para resolver la dialéctica del esclavo. En cierto sentido, en toda situación humana fundamental solo hay dos medios de proceder: el gerencial y técnico, por un lado, y el reflexivo y filosófico, por el otro.

El segundo medio para resolver la dialéctica del esclavo consiste en tenerlos bien, “no solo por los esclavos”, aclara el ateniense, “sino más bien por sí mismos” (6.777d2-3). En toda su majestad, Platón entra en escena en boca del ateniense. No se obra correctamente, no se es virtuoso, ante todo por los otros, sino por uno mismo, en lo que el ateniense manifiesta un acuerdo básico con la posición socrática acerca de la virtud. En efecto, cuando, en fórmula sin parangón, Sócrates sostiene que “la virtud no procede del dinero, sino que es por la virtud como la riqueza y todo lo demás llega a ser bueno para el hombre, tanto en lo que hace a lo privado como en lo público” (*Apología 30b*), determina con ello que la virtud es un fin para la propia alma y solo a partir de allí una posesión cualquiera podrá ser un bien para el hombre. Ocurre, empero, que la posesión de un esclavo no es una posesión como cualquier otra, por lo que, primero que todo, habrá que garantizar la virtud del “poseedor” y de allí procederá cualquier bien que pueda darse en dicha “posesión”, como se muestra a continuación. La existencia de esclavos, con toda su necesidad histórica, ofrece, precisamente por ello, la piedra de toque para el hombre virtuoso. Donde todos los pensadores vieron únicamente la degradación de lo humano —que la hay, ¿quién podría negarlo?—, Platón ve una luz y se propone seguirla hasta su fuente. En primer lugar, “no se debe actuar con violencia (*húbrin hubrízein*) hacia los esclavos” (6.777d3-4); que podría transliterarse quizás, interpretando un poco, como “no deben deshonorarse con injuria”. ¿Esto qué significa? Que en las relaciones sociales, *nunca* debe actuarse con violencia, con mayor fuerza y precisión, nunca debe maltratarse con ultrajes a otro —donde la duplicación del comportamiento afrentoso en el verbo —*hubrízein*— y en el sustantivo (*húbrin*) indica un modo estable de ser, no un mero incidente—, puesto que si con los esclavos no debe obrarse así, *a fortiori* con nadie más. El esclavo, ese ser humano arisco, descontentadizo e irritable, como todos

los seres humanos cuando se les constriñe en su libertad, desde su condición servil establece un baremo que sirve de prueba y de punto de referencia para el hombre virtuoso. Por eso, en segundo lugar, “si es posible, hay que cometer menos injusticias con ellos que con los iguales” (6.777d4-5). Esta declaración preparatoria, donde el trato injusto se identifica con la insolente malquerencia, se encuentra ya cargada de los frutos de la virtud. Al ciudadano que todavía no ha entendido que el caso del esclavo viene traspasado por una dialéctica irresoluble, se lo orienta hacia lo esencial: que cometa con el esclavo menos injusticias que con su par. Pero ya es hora de recoger el fruto. Hay que hablar en positivo. Hay que decir lo que es.

Viene, entonces, el discurso áureo que se erige como una de las mayores manifestaciones del espíritu humano: “Se puede reconocer claramente (*diádelos*) al que verdaderamente (*ho phúsei*) y no de forma ficticia (*mè plastôs*) respeta (*sébon*) la justicia (*díken*), porque odia (*misôn*) realmente (*óntos*) la injusticia (*ádikon*) hecha a aquellos hombres con los que es fácil (*rháidion*) ser injusto (*adikeîn*)” (6.777d5-7). Aquí ya no hay esclavos. El esclavo ha dejado su lugar a todos aquellos con los que es fácil ser injusto. Podría alguien todavía reprocharle a Platón el no haber expuesto con toda la claridad deseable la inaceptabilidad política y ética de la esclavitud, a pesar de que en el examen conducido hasta ahora no queda mucho margen para tal acusación. Pero un reproche tal podría darse. ¿Y qué diría Platón, si viera el mundo de hoy, el más rico, el que cuenta con más medios y más posibilidades? ¿Qué diría de nosotros, que hemos llenado este mundo de opulencia con innumerables seres humanos que ciertamente no son esclavos, pero con los cuales es fácil, muy fácil ser injusto? No se trata, por supuesto, de tomar una falsa decisión entre una situación y otra, sino de no levantar irreflexivamente el dedo acusador, sin haber comprendido a cabalidad la profundidad del problema. El esclavo es en la Antigüedad aquel con quien es muy fácil ser injusto, pero lo admirable es que Platón haya encontrado una categoría en donde incluir al esclavo, categoría que rebasa los límites de su tiempo y alcanza validez universal. Platón entiende que la necesaria estructura política —donde se aloja esa necesidad de la que surge la esclavitud— conlleva siempre la existencia de algunos o de muchos con quienes es muy fácil ser injusto. Aquellos *mínimos* de la ciudad política los establece como los *máximos* del criterio de la virtud, resolviendo de una vez y para siempre la dialéctica del esclavo. Aquí ya no hay ambigüedad alguna ni puede haberla: se muestra con absoluta claridad (*diádelos*) que alguien, desde su ser más profundo (*ho phúsei*), y no por apariencia o de un modo artificioso (*mè plastôs*), honra (*sébon*) la justicia (*díken*), porque odia (*misôn*) de verdad (*óntos*) lo injusto (*ádikon*) que se les hace a aquellos seres humanos contra quienes sería fácil (*rháidion*) cometer injusticia (*adikeîn*). Por supuesto que esta claridad meridiana se manifiesta en las acciones de aquel individuo que deja patente que desde lo más profundo de su ser venera la justicia y que de verdad odia la injusticia porque él mismo es justo con aquellos con quienes le sería fácil ser injusto, y eso está a la vista de todo el mundo; por el contrario, quien dice que respeta la justicia, pero lo hace de un modo artificioso y ficticio, no tiene ni la actitud ni la

presencia de ánimo para obrar de modo justo con aquellos con quienes le es muy fácil ser injusto, y eso también lo ven todos. No es ingenuo Platón, por supuesto, y entiende que muchos querrán hacerse pasar por justos, pero solo cuando les convenga.<sup>12</sup> Lo difícil (*khalepós*) de la posesión del esclavo se reconoce como lo fácil (*rháidion*) del obrar injustamente hacia él. Solo en el proceder del hombre verdaderamente justo halla su resolución esta dialéctica, tal como lo reconoce el ateniense: “el que ha llegado a estar sin mancha de impiedad o injusticia en sus hábitos y acciones para con los esclavos, sería el más capaz de implantar una semilla de virtud” (6.777d7-e2).

Todavía guarda el ateniense una última sorpresa para Clinias, pues lo que se ha dicho admite una generalización explícita: “Es posible afirmar eso mismo correctamente, cuando se habla de un amo (*despótei*), un tirano (*turánnoi*) o del que encabeza cualquier tipo de poder (*pâsan dunasteían dunasteúonti*) respecto del más débil que él” (6.777e2-4). El caso del esclavo es el más extremo en lo que se refiere a relaciones de injusticia, pero no es ni mucho menos el único. El ateniense inserta la relación del amo con el esclavo dentro de un conjunto más amplio, en el que también cabe la del tirano con sus gobernados, y, en general, la de todo aquel que ejerce cualquier tipo de poder respecto de quien es más débil que él; que el ateniense haga esta generalización demuestra que la categoría de ‘aquellos con quienes es fácil ser injusto’ se introduce de propósito y se usa con precisión para abordar otros dilemas éticos referidos a la desigualdad en las relaciones de poder. Es necesario que, en cuanto entidad política, la ciudad se organice según relaciones de poder, y el ateniense hace pie en las lecciones sacadas de la dialéctica del esclavo para ampliar su tesis. Esta viene a decir, entonces, que allí donde se dé una diferencia de poder, se reconoce con toda claridad a quien es justo porque obra con justicia respecto de aquel subordinado con el que, por serlo, podría fácilmente ser injusto; al contrario, queda patente que tan solo finge la justicia aquel que obra con injusticia respecto de aquel que le es subordinado, pues con él le es fácil ser injusto. Aquí el ateniense simplemente señala un problema estructural de la constitución del cuerpo político; las leyes que se le van a ofrecer a Magnesia tratarán en alguna medida de corregir esta debilidad constitutiva de cualquier ciudad.

Sin embargo, en una última referencia al esclavo puede discernirse un principio que tiene la mayor pertinencia como norma de acción dentro de las estructuras de poder. La cuestión es que muchos amos corrompen a los esclavos al tratarlos como si fueran libres. Por el contrario, determina el ateniense,

cuando se le dirige la palabra a un esclavo debe convertirse en una orden pura y simple (*skhedòn epítaxin*), sin hacer ningún tipo de bromas (*mè prospaízontas*)

12 Por eso, no hay que apresurarse a ver contradicción entre este pasaje de *Leyes* 7.777d y el de *República* 2.358b-367e. En este último, Glaucón y Adimanto exponen las ventajas de ser injusto pareciendo justo, pero como un caso límite de prueba de la justicia, para que Sócrates les enseñe de la manera más convincente que para el alma lo mejor es la justicia, no su mera apariencia. Una vez se gana este conocimiento, es patente qué tipo de acciones provienen del alma justa y cuáles, del alma injusta, como queda claro en el proceso de corrupción de la ciudad (libros 8 y 9).

con los sirvientes, ni con las mujeres ni con los varones (*mét' oûn theleiais méte árresin*), en lo que muchos corrompen de manera totalmente insensata a sus esclavos y suelen hacer más difícil su vida, tanto en que aquellos sean mandados, como en que ellos mismos manden (6.777e6-778a4).

En su aplicación al trato con los esclavos el texto es prístino y no requiere de ningún comentario adicional. Su interés aquí reside en que estas instrucciones de trato vienen enseguida de la generalización de la esclavitud a cualquier relación de poder dentro de la ciudad. Procediendo a hacer una generalización parecida, puede decirse, entonces, que, allí donde haya una relación de poder, el superior debe proceder con el subordinado de una manera “pura y simple”, es decir, debe impartir una orden sin más (*skhedòn epitaxin*), “sin hacer ningún tipo de bromas” (*mè prosaízontas*), “ni con las mujeres ni con los varones” (*mét' oûn theleiais méte árresin*). En el no acatamiento de esta disposición surge la corrupción, tanto del subordinado como del subordinante, pues una relación, como se ha visto, ya de suyo difícil por la naturaleza arisca del ser humano cuando siente coartada su libertad, se enturbia cuando se le mezclan elementos que no le son propios, con alusiones indirectas a situaciones personales favorables o desfavorables, muchas veces con un componente de género. Nuestra sociedad puede también aprender una palabra de Platón en este respecto.

Para terminar quizás pueda hacerse una recapitulación del esquema interpretativo propuesto, para precisar la diferencia entre las dos líneas argumentativas que se han desarrollado en este complejo texto. El ateniense comienza reconociendo la dificultad inherente a la consideración del esclavo en cuanto posesión, dificultad que se expresa en una contradicción decisiva, a saber, decir que es buen esclavo, si se usa mal, y decir que es mal esclavo, si se usa bien. La dialéctica del esclavo comprende la identificación, el examen y la resolución de esta contradicción. Tras la identificación, su examen se da en dos pasos sucesivos, relacionados respectivamente con cada uno de los interlocutores del ateniense. El primero de ellos, con un sentido político y social, se dirige al espartano Megilo, representante aquí del extremo sistema esclavista lacedemonio. El ateniense le pone de presente que, así como hay quienes no confían para nada en los esclavos —para lo que se aduce una cuestionable razón poética—, hay también quienes, salvados incluso por la conducta virtuosa de su servidor, proceden de modo exactamente contrario. Ante la perplejidad del otro interlocutor, el cretense Clinias, el ateniense, en un argumento ahora en clave antropológica, enuncia el principio fundamental de que el ser humano es un animal que no acepta someterse a otro, en otras palabras, que es libre por naturaleza, lo que hace difícil establecer la diferencia entre siervo y señor. Es cierto que *de hecho* hay esclavos, pero, en conformidad con lo que se acaba de afirmar, de ahí no cabe derivar ninguna orientación de principio que regule el trato hacia ellos. En la resolución de la contradicción, el ateniense enuncia que, tras el examen adelantado, solo hay dos vías para proceder: una pragmática, administrativa, puede decirse; otra filosófica, racional. La vía pragmática consiste en mantener bajo control la naturaleza, por definición políticamente libre, de los esclavos. En la vía filosófica, el ateniense identifica con

toda claridad el principio argénteo del verdadero comportamiento virtuoso: no obrar injustamente contra aquellos con quienes sería muy fácil ser injusto. El esclavo de la Antigüedad queda incluido dentro de una categoría ética universal, la de aquellos con quienes es muy fácil ser injusto, justa piedra de toque de la virtud verdadera.

## Conclusión

La dialéctica del esclavo en las *Leyes* de Platón se da tanto en la estructura en grande de la obra, como en el pequeño pasaje central objeto de la presente indagación. En ambos casos se contraponen un conjunto de procedimientos políticos, destinados a mantener el orden de la ciudad o del individuo, a una consideración filosófica, donde el respeto, la razonabilidad y el diálogo son medios fundamentales para el logro de la virtud, en la ciudad y en el individuo. Así como sería falso sin más sostener que Platón vio con toda claridad que la esclavitud fuera moral y políticamente objetable, es también simplista y precipitado afirmar que no entrevió nada de ello ni se propuso de ningún modo abordar filosóficamente una cuestión tan sensible. En esta investigación se ha expuesto la matizada, compleja y difícil argumentación que en este respecto Platón desarrolla en las *Leyes*, lo que se ha denominado ‘la dialéctica del esclavo’. Es notable que si bien, por un lado, el filósofo quedó preso de posturas comunes en su época sobre esta institución, por otro, identifica, expone y resuelve la dialéctica en líneas gloriosas, que mantienen un sentido permanente allí donde se encuentre una desigualdad en relaciones de poder, allí donde haya seres humanos “con los que es fácil ser injusto” (6.777d7).

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## Friendship in Captivity? Plato's Lysis as a Guide to Interspecies Justice

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## Friendship in Captivity? Plato's Lysis as a Guide to Interspecies Justice

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### ABSTRACT

How should a just society treat the many non-human animals that live entirely within human societies? If securing the capabilities of non-human animals is a basic commitment of justice, how can we know which capabilities to secure, and at what level, to enable them to live lives worthy of their dignity? Friendship, as understood through Plato's Lysis, suggests a posture toward animals that can enable humans to better apprehend what their flourishing requires and to embrace changes in human-animal relationships that are necessary to animals' flourishing. This conception of friendship deepens the role of the species norm in evaluating humans' relationships with animals and enables us to see the flourishing of other animals as intimately linked to human flourishing.

### KEYWORDS

Capability approach; other species capabilities; human animal relations; friendship; species norm; interspecies justice

Lucy, a 45 year old Asian elephant, lives in captivity at the Edmonton Valley Zoo in Alberta, Canada. She arrived at the zoo in a crate in 1977 as a baby of barely two—prematurely weaned<sup>1</sup> and likely traumatised—after being taken from her family in the wild of Sri Lanka. Some claim that she was orphaned; her mother may have died defending her from capture. During her childhood and early adolescence, Lucy was the sole elephant at the zoo. She met other elephants twice on breeding loans to another zoo in the late 1980s. In 1989 she was joined by Samantha, an orphaned African elephant baby. Lucy and Samantha coexisted precariously until 2007 when Samantha was sent to a zoo in North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> The bitter cold of Edmonton and constrained space have left Lucy with chronic sinus infections and arthritis, as well as foot, dental and respiratory problems. Her keepers explain her isolation as a preference. They describe Lucy as a “people elephant” and assert their own connection to her as crucial to her well-being, and more important than a hospitable climate, freedom of movement, and elephant companionship.<sup>3</sup> According to the zoo director, Denise Prefontaine, “Lucy is a calm, content and well-adjusted elephant that is part of a ‘special family.’” Prefontaine says Lucy has unique relationships

with each of her keepers, and describes herself as “really proud to be one of [Lucy’s] herd.”<sup>4</sup>

Lucy’s plight is an extreme version of the condition of many animals who live entirely in the context of human communities. Animals who live, work and provide companionship to humans are commonly subject to routine forms of domination. Humans control their access to food, the nature of their space, and their opportunities to exercise and relate to conspecifics. And like Lucy’s keepers, many humans who share their lives and resources with other-than-human animals regard them with affection and think of them as friends. The strong bonds that humans feel with many animals, along with humans’ characterisation of their relationships with other species as friendship, have motivated a number of recent philosophical inquiries into cross species friendship. Work in this area has largely focused on the possibility of friendship between humans and other species with an eye to how proximity and connection to other species shape humans’ obligation to extend recognition and care (Townley 2010; Fröding and Peterson 2011; Rowlands 2011; Milligan 2014; Scotton 2017). This article draws on Plato’s *Lysis* to ask instead what it would mean for humans to be friends with other species. It takes up this question for two reasons. First, as Lucy’s situation indicates, positive sentiment is not sufficient to secure the flourishing of other species. Second, in the context of the capabilities approach to justice for all species as articulated by Martha Nussbaum, friendship offers a productive model for a cross species community of justice and indicates the relational habits that humans must develop to achieve it.<sup>5</sup>

The conception of friendship in Plato’s *Lysis* can deepen our understanding of the *species norm*, and thus enhance the role it plays in evaluating humans’ relationships with animals. It suggests a posture toward animals that can enable humans to better apprehend what animal flourishing requires and to embrace changes in human-animal relationships that are necessary to animals’ flourishing. Most importantly, friendship provides a way of understanding the flourishing of other-than-human beings as intimately linked to human flourishing. In making this argument, I first present a model of friendship derived from Plato’s *Lysis* and apply it to contemporary human relationships with horses and dogs. I then suggest how this conception of friendship can both complement and deepen the “species norm” advanced in Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to justice and show how it can guide changes in the relationships between humans and domesticated animals to better support their mutual flourishing.

### Friendship in Plato’s *Lysis*

Plato’s *Lysis*,<sup>6</sup> a canonical text in philosophical reflections on human friendship, offers an understanding of friendship as a relationship through which humans

learn to experience and attend to others as unique beings, rather than as projections of their own needs and desires. In this dialogue, Socrates describes friendship as love for what is *oikeion* to us (221e33-4), meaning what is “our own” or suitable to us—as individuals and as human beings.<sup>7</sup> However, this “ownness” is the puzzle that the *Lysis*, and—in my read—friendship itself, seeks to unfold.<sup>8</sup> Friendship ultimately appears as a mature expression of the human ability to experience, care for, and take pleasure in the flourishing of others that is developed through *difference*. While friendship may involve a sense of affinity or sameness, its essence is in the connection between beings in a form of membership that preserves the distinctiveness of each. In contrast to the bond between lovers or families, friendship is a relationship within which we encounter what is our own, in which we see and are seen by the other, and to which we belong without being reduced to an aspect of the other or subsumed with the other under some third category. *Lysis* suggests that humans develop as relational beings through experiencing others who regard themselves as ends in their own right and learning to co-create a kind of belonging in which they are both their own and the other’s.

The *Lysis* is set up as a demonstration of how to be a friend. It begins with Socrates offering to show a young man named Hippothales how to talk to Lysis, the boy with whom he is enamored (205a, 206c-d). The men are in a gymnasium watching boys wrestle. Both the setting and the interaction of the characters contribute to the conception of friendship that the conversation brings forth. In a figurative sense, Socrates is teaching Hippothales how to relate to the desire and fascination that draw him to Lysis. Hippothales withdraws into the background when Socrates engages Lysis, but he remains an observer throughout the dialogue (207b). Occasional reminders of his presence maintain the theme of a young man learning to relate to the passions that draw him into relationship yet also block his experience of the one he imagines to be their object (210e, 222b). As Socrates’ attention moves from Hippothales to Lysis and then to Lysis’s friend Menexenus, the scope of relationships unfolds outward to spheres of belonging that encompass greater degrees of difference, moving from self, to family, to neighbours, to fellow citizens. Each successive interaction articulates what was dramatised in the previous one as the narcissism of the previous character becomes the focus of the new conversation.

The inquiry into friendship in the dialogue begins with the question of whether loving or being loved creates a friend (212b). Hippothales and Lysis, as the lover and the loved respectively, are each, in different ways, incapable of seeing others as distinct beings with their own conception of the good. Hippothales regards Lysis as a body to be captured the way hunters seek their prey, or as an object to possess for his own aggrandizement (206a). He hopes Socrates will teach him to manipulate Lysis, rather than to truly communicate with him (206c). Socrates points out that Hippothales’ idealisation of Lysis is narcissistic and self-referential. He invites Hippothales (and the reader) to see that what

Hippothales is experiencing is not love but merely an encounter with his own projections, which obscure and alienate the potential friend, possibly even damaging his ability to come into a reciprocal relationship (205e). Hippothales might master a language of persuasion and manipulation but it would not bring him into friendship with Lysis; it would merely enable him to impose his will more effectively. Relating to Lysis as an object impairs his capabilities as a human being because the development of Lysis's relational potential requires social recognition. As a being capable of reasoning and independent thought, for example, he needs people who relate to him through those qualities in order to develop them. Hippothales knows only the extension of his own desire, so he is neither capable of seeing Lysis in his particularity as a human being nor of supporting its expression. His interest in relating to Lysis is like the persuasion of pets, as well as farm, zoo and laboratory animals, whom humans render through breeding and training into images of ourselves and more compliant objects of human needs. We condition such animals to their captivity in order to get what we want from them in ways that are easier and more compatible with our own needs and desires, and then we call them friends.<sup>9</sup>

Lysis appears to the men in the dialogue as a set of physical features and he is identified by his father's name (204e). The men see him as the colour of his hair, the shape of his body and his family lineage.<sup>10</sup> Lysis's friend Menexenus, by contrast, relates to Lysis as the being who appears through those qualities. The boys playfully compare the way that they are alike and different with respect to their physical features. Their friendship consists in their shared attention, laughter, and even conflict, through which they are both separate and together (207c, 211a-b).<sup>11</sup> Each is receptive to the words and gestures of the other as conveying something about himself, as a meaningful presentation of his being. We can see in this contrast that experiencing the other—whether human or nonhuman—as a striving being attentive to its own life, is not the same as identifying an array of qualities. It is more akin to the posture of a friend; it involves an openness to what might be revealed and a commitment to its intelligibility. Similarly, identifying other species from the standpoint of their “behavior,” (Horowitz 2018) as if their actions held no meaning for themselves, or from measurements of their physiological features, cannot on its own suggest the quality of the life of the animal, its striving and “ownness” to itself.

When Socrates turns his questioning from Hippothales to Lysis, Lysis demonstrates another type of narcissism that plays out through the experience of familial love. Socrates takes Lysis through a series of questions about his parents' restrictions on his actions, whom his parents' trust with their affairs, and the conditions under which they extend their trust (207d-209b). They conclude that Lysis's parents are interested in his development and would give him full power over their affairs if he were capable of managing them (209c). Lysis then eagerly accepts Socrates' invitation to imagine that his neighbours and all



of the world would view him in the same light as his parents do, and entrust their affairs to him if he were wise (209d-210c). Lysis imagines the wisdom his parents seek to foster in him as a source of total freedom and power over others. When he becomes wise, Lysis posits, others will love him and surrender to his control. He envisions himself as central to the lives of his neighbours and fellow citizens as he is central to the affection of his parents (210d). Lysis doesn't recognise his neighbours as having interests and cares of their own that they might invest in their own children's development, for example. He imagines his maturation in accordance with his parent's love for him as conferring the power to act on others' behalf. Like Hippothales, who is incapable of distinguishing Lysis from his own narcissistic projection, Lysis has not yet come to see himself in the world with others who are not instruments of his needs and who care equally for their own lives. His experience within a family does not teach him this because the family is an expression of a singular interest, albeit one extended across a group. Within a family we might come to know our specialness and what is owed to us as human beings, but family relationships do not show us the specialness of others to themselves.

Lysis's regard for his own specialness without recognising others as special to themselves is reflected in humans' longstanding elevation of our particular excellence over that of other species and in our failure to regard other species as entitled to their own lives. Lysis's certainty that his maturation would entitle him to manage the affairs of others is analogous to the view of cross species relationships as a knowledge problem, rather than as a question of justice (Purves and Delon 2018). Like Lysis, humans fail to see ourselves in the world with others who have an interest in their own lives akin to the interest we hold in our own. This in turn leads to the potential misrecognition of other species' responses to humans as loyalty, affection, or love, in the context of relationships that do not include the full range of their interests. In the absence of recognition and accommodation of others as invested in their lives as we are in our own, a relationship is not really friendship.

When the conversation passes to Menexenus, Lysis becomes the observer and target of Socrates' teaching as Socrates prompts Menexenus to articulate what has been dramatised thus far: a friend is not merely one who feels love, like Hippothales, nor one who is loved, like Lysis. Friendship requires both loving and being loved in return (212a-213c). It is thus conditioned upon freedom and mutuality. One cannot be a friend without another to love and reciprocate that love; thus, friendship is a co-creation that relies on the freedom of each to either love or not love. The question then becomes who can be a friend to whom (214b), which is most relevant to the notion of friendship between humans and other species. At this point we have already seen a certain kind of maturity to be a condition of friendship. Specifically, friends must be able to see one another as separate from themselves and to maintain their differences while sharing a common sense of belonging and care. We

have also seen association across differences as fostering this capacity in a way that relationships bound by a single interest—to self or to family—do not. Socrates and the boys conclude that likeness cannot be a condition of friendship because the parties to the friendship would not need each other with respect to the qualities that they share (215b). Investigating whether similarity is the basis for friendship also sets up consideration of friendship as utility: is the other really a friend if the relationship is grounded in the usefulness of the other? At first pass it seems that difference cannot be the basis of friendship. A friendship based in complementarity that arises from the lack of a quality in one that is found in the other falls short of valuing the other in their unique wholeness (220b). Experiencing the other as a response to one's own needs or reducing them to some quality that they bear is the immature, narcissistic posture of Hippothales to Lysis, which has been demonstrated to fall short of friendship.

Ultimately Socrates concludes that friendship arises from desire, which is occasioned by the absence of what is one's own.<sup>12</sup> The belonging of friendship however, cannot be based on sameness or the argument becomes inconsistent (222b).<sup>13</sup> Sameness, we might infer, cannot be a basis of friendship because it does not challenge one to see the other. The quality of love experienced in sameness does not develop the human capability to extend love across difference that is characteristic of friendship. Conversely, being loved for the way that one is like another does not sufficiently appreciate and foster one's distinctiveness. The feelings that draw us toward others are an invitation to develop our capacity as humans to create relationships of belonging that foster others in their distinctiveness. This inquiry into friendship as difference begins with Lysis and Menexenus, who are friends. They draw one another into new experiences and perspectives and learn from one another. The push and pull and coming and going in their exploration of the relationship that they are already living together models the freedom and mutuality that they arrive at as qualities necessary to friendship. The utility of friendship to them is the ability to experience one another in the sphere of belonging that they co-created. Friendship is the means through which they discover what is their own as they move from their families into the world. That "ownness" is the ability of humans to create relationships of mutual flourishing and to experience the unique good of others as an aspect of their own good.

A final gesture toward the qualities of friendship occurs in the close of the dialogue when Socrates says to the boys,

Now we've done it, Lysis and Menexenus—made fools of ourselves, I an old man, and you as well. These people here will go away saying that we are friends of one another—for I count myself in with you—but what a friend is, we have not yet been able to find out. (223b7-10)

Plato leaves the reader with the idea that friendship might be asymmetrical. What one brings to another in friendship, in the sense of being "in with"

them, is independent of what they bring in response. It is not a matter of tit for tat. If friendship were dependent on the other's response in kind, the relationship would be transactional. Openness to friendship entails an exposure of one's self. It involves a risk or a commitment to a possibility, the outcome of which one does not control and the success of which is its own reward.

Friendship then, is an encounter of one's own good with and through others. It is a co-creation that opens each to a broader expression of being and a deeper understanding of what another's flourishing consists in and how it might be supported. It is not reducible to affection, attraction, camaraderie, resonance, or cooperation, although these qualities are part of the experience of friendship. Rather, friendship is a cultivated state of receptivity, an "unclosing of ourselves" through attunement to the selectivity of our reception (Kompridis 2013, 21). We become friends by learning to see and respond to others in their difference and in doing so we develop our capacity to connect beyond ourselves in relationships of care and mutuality. While it seems unlikely that Plato would have recognised cross species relationships as "friendship," *Lysis* suggests that it is the ability to extend past the self to create spheres of belonging that tend to the good of others that is *oikeion* to humans. Thus, human friendship is neither limited to humans, nor constrained by the possibility of reciprocity.

The *Lysis* also highlights various ways that humans can fail to see the other as a friend—and fail to see their own failure. The fallacies of friendship portrayed in the *Lysis*, including seeing the other as a projection of one's own desire, seeing the other merely as a set of useful or attractive qualities to appropriate, and seeing one's own agenda as the other's, are evident in humans' relationships with dogs and horses and belie their characterisation as friendship.

### **The Fallacies of Friendship in Dogs and Horses**

Animals that live entirely within human communities, as companions, co-workers, or captives for research or entertainment, are in many cases experienced by humans as "friends." Yet the notion of friendship developed above should give us pause about using this term. Attention to how humans have incorporated dogs and horses in particular into human societies reveals that these relationships are not co-created realms of mutual flourishing. Practices of care and discipline of horses and dogs commonly fail to recognise and support these animals as beings with their own good and particular form of flourishing. Additionally, training regiments that might appear as collaboration between humans and horses or dogs to develop their particular excellence often fail to treat these animals as having an interest in their own lives. Finally, the paradigms through which humans perceive these species and understand their own role in building relationships with them can reduce the animals' expression of their own good and impair humans' ability to see and support their flourishing, which ultimately inhibits human development as well.

Horses and dogs have both been part of human societies for a long time. Dogs are understood to have co-evolved with humans and participated in our adaptation to one another as an interspecies system.<sup>14</sup> We are tied together through the bodily responses that elicit sympathetic resonance and care, and reproduction of the genetically encoded friendliness that made dogs receptive to humans in the first place has shaped their appearance and behaviour to optimise our responsiveness to them.<sup>15</sup> As dependents in our households or vagrants in our cities, dogs are captive to humans and subject to various forms of control and domination. Their survival in modern societies is conditioned upon compliance with legal codes and an infrastructure that they do not participate in creating. However, dogs' capacity for attachment to humans and receptivity to human modes of communication create the possibility of reciprocal relationships with humans.

Horses are different. Their captivity is a result of conquering through a combination of seduction and fear. They were brought into human societies to make use of their physical power around 4000 BCE (Goodwin 2007, 3). Throughout history, they have provided mobility to humans and the capacity to control territory, people and other species. They have been tools of aggression and dominance despite their intense sensitivity and instinctive avoidance of conflict as prey animals. Humans' use of horses involves taking them from grasslands where they are quite capable of living without humans, and making them dependent on humans for food and social connection (16). Unlike dogs, horses do not seem to form attachments to humans that are more significant than their relationships with other horses and the bonds they do form are more dependent on the characteristics of the humans with whom they connect (Payne et al. 2016).

Humans' relationships with both species involve objectification and projection of human desire. Like Hippothales' orientation to Lysis, humans often mistake the strength of their feelings toward dogs and horses as care for these animals. They fail to recognise dogs or horses as independent, complete beings with powers and potentials of their own, and establish relationships that hold no consideration for the animals on their own terms. Dogs, for example, are often treated as receptacles of humans' needs, as outlets for their anger, and as status symbols. More recently they are lauded for their beneficial effect on human mental and physical health and social development. They are dressed up and decorated in Halloween costumes, dresses, bow ties and jewelry. They are subject to fancy grooming and forced to sit for portraits. In many cases they spend long boring days of isolation and limited exercise subject to the whims of humans for when they eat, relieve themselves, experience affection and express the power of their bodies. They are smothered and deprived by human affection.

Just as Hippothales' misrecognition of Lysis is harmful to Lysis's flourishing because it denies him the social recognition that he needs to develop as a

relational being, the human pursuit of dog qualities as extensions of their own needs and vanities has harmful consequences for individual dogs as well as for dogs in general.<sup>16</sup> Regard for dogs as specific features has led to physical disabilities and diseases that cause dogs chronic pain and poor health and undermine their ability to function in the world as dogs (Arman 2007; Asher et al. 2009; Hubrecht, Wickens, and Kirkwood 2017, 277). Altering their height, the shape of their ears and tails, and the length of their fur, through breeding and body modification prevents dogs from communicating effectively with one another (Bradshaw and Rooney 2017). This undermines their ability to manage conflict to maintain their own security and affiliate effectively with members of their own species.

Treatment that humans imagine as arising from and expressive of love for dogs is also often catastrophic for specific dogs when it does not recognise the dog's way of being. In the United States approximately 3.3 million dogs are relinquished to shelters or picked up as strays due to abandonment. 670,000 of these dogs are euthanised (ASPCA 2015–2018). When dogs fail to display the devotion, trust and playfulness that humans seek, they often suffer abuse, neglect or abandonment (Hubrecht, Wickens, and Kirkwood 2017, 279). They are subject to alienation from human affection when they display doglike behaviour that offends human sensibility or act out due to inattention to their developmental needs. Compromise of dogs' well-being can also occur when "owners' pathologically strong attachments to the dogs in their care" manifests in animal hoarding (Patronek and Nathanson 2009, 279). However, hoarding is an extreme of a continuum of socially acceptable ways that humans appropriate dogs to their own needs that occur through affection and are characterised as friendship.

Horses, in addition to being more overtly appropriated for their usefulness by humans, are also extolled for their beauty, power, grace and intelligence. Humans describe the horses that they relate to through various forms of riding as their partners, and often as their friends. The intensity of humans' affection for horses is evident in fiction and in the narrative accounts of the people who work with them (Birke 2008; Maurstad, Davis, and Cowles 2013; Birke and Hockenhull 2015; Daspher 2017), yet the practices that enable these relationships often disregard the horse's particular form of flourishing. The size and the cost of maintaining horses limit the number of people who are able to keep horses as members of their households. Thus, for most people, close connection with horses depends on an industry of stables for riding and organised competitions. This industry reproduces expectations of the appearance and behaviour of horses that often cause neck and leg problems. For example, horses are subject to tail mutilation as well as to the (illegal but persistent) practice of applying caustic chemicals to the legs and feet to exaggerate leg motion to meet performance standards.<sup>17</sup> Even dressage performance ideals of the head angle of horses cause hyperflexion of the neck

by forcing the horse's nose to its chest.<sup>18</sup> While many of these practices have come under criticism in the horse world, the standards of beauty and athletic achievement that lead to the abuse continue to guide expectations of horse and human behaviour.

The equipment and stabling conditions that enable equestrian practices also reflect humans' failure to consider that the qualities that evoke their affection and admiration belong to living beings with distinct ways of flourishing and lives of their own. Riding involves control of the horse's head with a bridle and (most commonly) a bit that exerts pressure on the tongue. The horse's compliance with the direction of the rider is produced through the threat of pain. Saddles, spurs and whips, which are standard mediators between horse and rider, can also cause harm. Transportation for competition is a significant source of stress to horses both in transit and in the exposure to novel pathogens at competitions (Waran, McGreevy, and Casey 2007, 125). When they are not in use by humans, many horses are kept in solitary stalls or stable boxes, isolated and with little room to move. These conditions deprive horses of the physical and social connection to other horses that they seek in noncaptive conditions, where membership in a group is an essential aspect of their survival (Goodwin 2007). Being subject to continual change in their social groups by humans who have power over where horses are stalled produces loneliness and conflict among horses (9). In addition to denying horses a valuable source of comfort and security, such practices violate their fundamental social agency (Jones and McGreevy 2010).

Stabling also results in a rhythm of activity and sources of nutrition that negatively impact horses' well-being. Whereas horses in the wild move constantly and selectively graze throughout the day, stabled horses endure extended periods of immobility interrupted by intense exercise that can damage their muscle fibres (Casey 2007, 21). Grazing on managed pastures causes a variety of health problems, including liver disease, parasites, and inflammation of the laminae of the hoof, which compromises athletic functioning and is a common reason for euthanasia (22). While many of these issues are recognised in horse care, the negative impact of the conditions that horses are compelled to bear are interpreted in horse management as behavioural problems of the horses because they fail to conform to the expectations of humans. Recognition of the origin of such problems in living conditions that do not suit the horse—and potentially in the horse's loss of agency over those conditions—is precluded by owner focused concerns about convenience and cost effective management (Mills and Clarke 2007, 78).

In this light, human affection for horses and dogs is self-referential. Like Hippothales' posture toward Lysis, the strength of feelings for these animals or appreciation for their qualities is contextualised by fundamental regard for them as instruments of human desire. Friendship, by contrast, would require recognising them as living beings with qualities of their own to develop, and

relating to them in a way that enables the development of those qualities. In relating to animals as objects that humans can own, manipulate, and dispose of at their own pleasure, humans do not really experience these animals at all. They merely encounter their own, often self-justifying expectations about the scope of the animals' potential.

The failure to see the good of the other that is evident in human treatment of dogs and horses is one impediment to friendship. Failure to recognise the good of the other as their *own* is another. This second fallacy of friendship, which Plato's dialogue demonstrates through the character Lysis, is especially evident in training regiments through which humans shape the behaviour of dogs and horses. Humans' work with these animals to develop communication and athletic skills might be perceived as identification and cultivation of the potential of these animals—of their particular good. However, even if these protocols are designed to develop the potential of the animals, they often fail to respect them as having an interest in directing their own lives. In this context, humans might experience themselves as central to the attention and affection of horses and dogs and imagine that their sense of being loved constitutes a reciprocal relationship of friendship. However, this perspective is likely to come from a failure to see the animal's world and the human's role within it from the animal's point of view.

Additionally, we might say that adapting horses and dogs to human societies is an act of friendship because they live within our societies, for dogs it seems necessarily and for horses as a matter of their own security. Arguments against activism to raise awareness of horse suffering in equine sports, as well as arguments in favour of employing horses in new modes, such as therapy, education and rehabilitation for humans, are often based in the importance of the horse having a use to humans for its own survival. Such arguments about the utility of horses and dogs perpetuate the idea that animals have value because of human use rather than as beings unto themselves. They fail to consider what the horses and dogs themselves are owed.

The methods through which horses and dogs are adapted to human communities that are propagated by experts as serving the best interest of dogs and horses both reflect and contribute to humans' inability to see them as beings with their own good and to recognise their entitlement to their own lives. The predominant methods in the twenty-first century are based in Skinnerian behaviourism, with both positive and negative reinforcement and punishment. There are also a number of approaches that claim to be based on understanding the animal's language, as special "whisperers" of dogs or horses. The latter approach for dogs, while framed in a language of friendship (e.g. *How to be Your Dog's Best Friend*<sup>19</sup>) is based on dominance and outdated assumptions about both the nature of dogs and the way that living beings learn (Pręgowski 2015, 528; Serpell 2017, 136). Cesar Millan, the dog whispering celebrity, for example, characterises dogs as engaged in a constant fight for dominance



with humans (2007). The *Nothing in Life is Free* (NILF) programme, recommended by the Humane Society in the United States, is also based on human mastery over the basic needs of a dog.<sup>20</sup> The approach encourages people to withhold food, attention, affection and entertainment until the dog “earns” it by complying with the human’s expectation. Under these paradigms, the dog’s basic need to affiliate is withheld to compel compliance with human demands. Horse training has an even stronger discipline oriented foundation, with the use of pain as punishment and the threat of pain as a means of maintaining a preferred behaviour. The idea of application and “release” from escalating pain is a primary method of directing horses, even among trainers who consider their methods to be gentle. The whispering approach to horses is less harsh but tends to be no more respectful of the horse as having its own preferences and motivations. In the discourse of horse training, horses are discussed as having their own will in the context of justifying punishment—a will that must be mastered and directed to comply with human goals. The idea that the “will” of a horse is also worthy of respect as the basis of its unique expression is absent. The assumption of human dominance—either as the proper order of relations between horses and humans, or as necessary for human safety—is firmly at the heart of the concept of horse training.

The dominance paradigm prevents humans from seeing horses and dogs as beings unto themselves by limiting interpretation of their actions to either resistance to human control or compliance with human mastery in response to conditioning. It forecloses consideration of the actions of horses and dogs as meaningful to themselves or part of their own striving. Positive training based on rewards similarly imputes a singular motivation to the animal and then uses the animal’s display of the expected behaviour as confirmation of what the horse or dog “is.” The potentially complex motivations of a horse or dog—including both achieving the way of being for which they are biologically adapted and affiliative and aesthetic preferences that are unique to themselves—are reduced to stimulus response. While human compliance with the expectations of those who have power over them can also be reduced to fear, hunger and relief at the alleviation of pain, it is more or less clear to humans that these conditions degrade the complex and multiple qualities that constitute the dignity of humans. Dogs and horses, by contrast, are seen as *only* these qualities, and thus necessitating human control.

### **Friendship as a Guide to the Species Norm**

In human relationships with horses and dogs, the priority of human desire leads to misrecognition of what belongs to these animals as their particular form of life and to deprivation of what they need to flourish. Additionally, acceptance of humans’ entitlement to shape the lives of horses and dogs denies them a role as collaborators in creating a world that supports their flourishing with humans.

In the capabilities approach to justice for nonhuman animals put forth by Martha Nussbaum in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), human understanding of what the flourishing of an animal consists in is guided by a *species norm*. The *species norm* is a set of capabilities considered essential to the dignity of a particular being developed in reference to that being as a member of a species. It provides a benchmark for judging whether a creature has sufficient opportunities to flourish as the kind of being that it is (2006, 365). In Nussbaum's capabilities approach, a well ordered society would secure these capabilities for its members as a matter of justice (2006, 179, 347). The species norm is important to prevent determination of what beings are owed as a matter of justice based on a prior state of deprivation, or by parties that benefit from limiting their capabilities in some way (Nussbaum 2000, 111; 2001).

Yet, as Nussbaum acknowledges, identifying the set of capabilities that must be protected as a matter of justice for other species presents a less surmountable challenge than identifying the *species norm* for humans (2006, 352–356). This is true because humans have their own experience as humans to reference, along with recourse to the historical community of humans through their stories, reflections and creations (Nussbaum 1996; 2006, 179–193; 2013, 257). By contrast, humans must rely on their capacity to observe and communicate with other species in order to understand their capabilities and how to secure them. As human relationships with dogs and horses demonstrate, a number of factors complicate human recognition of what it means for these animals to flourish. Friendship, as conceptualised through Plato's *Lysis*, offers a way of enabling humans to better apprehend what animal flourishing requires and to see learning to understand and support other species' flourishing an aspect of the human good.

One problem with identifying the species norm is finding the appropriate mode of observation and framework for organising information. Other species can be observed in multiple ways that might contribute to an understanding of their potential. Their brains can be measured and compared to those of humans to determine whether they have a capability for emotions, their reproduction and gestation cycles can be tracked to determine the degree of bonding and nurturing invested in offspring, or their networks of relationships and ability to remember others of various species can be mapped as indicators of sociability. These ways of knowing can indicate aspects of animals' needs and the range of ways that they might act in the world. However, in the absence of a perspective that is open to understanding the meaningfulness of their actions, these modes of observation are not sufficient to grasp the quality of the animal's life, its striving and meaning to itself—its *ownness*.<sup>21</sup>

Another obstacle to identifying the essential capabilities of other species is that mastery over other species is within the scope of capabilities that many societies have secured for humans. The ideology of human superiority, and

humans' learned sense of entitlement to manage the lives of horses and dogs for their own purposes, impedes human understanding of the species norm for these animals as well as of the species norm for humans *vis à vis* these species. Additionally, dis-identification with the "animal" nature of other species is a common way that people understand their own qualities (Nussbaum 2004, 71–123). The dog-ness of a dog or the horse-ness of a horse might be recognised as a kind of defilement that humans have a responsibility to remedy (Serpell 2017, 302). The relationships between humans and other species in the context of human societies are so powerfully inflected with dominance and "use" that many humans have little imagination and even less experience of what it would mean to take seriously the investment of these species in their own lives, their potential to flourish in multiple ways, and their valid claim to a world that supports the capabilities that constitute their dignity. While dominance over other species is seen by many as the rightful status of humans, it might also be considered an *adaptive preference* of humans since many societies do not support the human capability for respectful relationships with other species. Thus, in order for humans to properly specify norms of flourishing for other species, they must address the perceptual and practical barriers to their own receptivity to ways of being that are different than their own.

Accurate identification of the species norm requires a mode of reception akin to friendship as developed in *Lysis*. Like relating to another as a friend, understanding others' way of flourishing requires seeing them as complete beings rather than as qualities that we can measure, classify, extol or possess. It involves recognising the lives expressed through their qualities as valuable and irreducible, and as their *own*. Finally, it involves a commitment to a possibility because the dignity of a given being is always revealed relationally. How animals are capable of flourishing depends on their current and prior access to the material and social conditions that enable that flourishing. For dogs and horses, and increasingly for all animals, humans are an active dimension of those conditions. When humans relate to animals as friends, they acknowledge how the intersubjective frame of encounter shapes our understanding of what it means for others to flourish as members of their own species. It enables us to create conditions for other beings to disclose their capabilities to us and to develop our own capabilities to relate to different ways of being.

The model of friendship in the *Lysis* shares with Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to justice an understanding of human flourishing as consisting in the ability to direct, develop and live up to the potential of their benevolent sentiments (2006). In a well ordered society, Nussbaum argues, citizens would both experience the flourishing of others as part of their own good and regard the capability failure of others as their own (91). Benevolent sentiments enable people to endorse formal structures that distribute capabilities in certain ways, and through those structures they secure for themselves the capability to

affiliate in a way that dignifies and gives expression to human benevolence. For Nussbaum, humans are moral works in progress whose social becoming requires “appropriate extension” of “what is fine in actual human beings,” which includes our ability to connect with and care for others as values unto themselves (91).

The movement toward justice, whether in a frame of human membership or in a cross species polity that recognises other species as fellow citizens (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013), requires moral habits of affiliation that enable people to experience the worthiness of others, perceive the capabilities that are central to others’ dignity, and commit to others’ flourishing as their own good.<sup>22</sup> The benevolent feelings that humans are capable of having for other species suggest the possibility of cross species justice. However, cross species justice can only be realised through cultivation and direction of those benevolent feelings to support the dignity of other life forms and honour that of humans. Friendship is a helpful model for understanding this relationship because it consists in learning to relate to and through one’s physical, emotional and imaginative experiences to create a world with others, and in finding pleasure in others’ flourishing as a benefit of doing so. Friendship and justice are connected in the sense that what friendship intuits and actualises intersubjectively, the state should secure through law and policy. Friendship is prior to justice because it guides the discovery of what justice must secure. It is more than justice because it is an actualisation of the human power to love and commit to the flourishing of others for their own sake. Its pleasure and scope are not bound by the law and are their own reward.

### **Mutual Flourishing Through Cross Species Friendship**

What then would it mean for humans and dogs or humans and horses to flourish together in the context of human society? An emerging discourse of “co-being” or “becoming with” dogs and horses suggests the possibility of relationships with greater reciprocity and respect for the autonomy of these animals (Brandt 2004; Haraway 2008). While a crucial aspect of the success of such relationships involves foregoing pre-determined outcomes—as friendship does—they demonstrate that horses and dogs can and will work symbiotically with humans without human control. Primatologist Barbara Smuts, for example, describes relating to her dog Safi, a German shepherd-Belgian sheepdog mix, based on what she learned about mutuality and cross species friendship while researching baboons:

I assumed from the start that she was a sentient being with the kind of wisdom I had discovered in the wild animals I had known. As much as possible, I tried to surrender expectations about who she was or what she could or could not do based on her

species identity. I communicated with her in the richest way possible, using words, nonverbal vocalizations, body language, gestures, and facial expressions. (2001, 303)

Smuts describes the mutuality in her relationship with Safi as manifest in their trading of roles when they navigate different spaces. When they are in human spaces, Smuts takes the lead in order to keep Safi safe from cars and other threats to her well-being. When they are outside of human habitation Safi chooses where they hike and takes responsibility for keeping Smuts safe and oriented, while introducing Smuts to the world that Safi's senses and intelligence experiences (303). Notably, Smuts invests effort in empathising with Safi and understanding the "subtle and refined" way that she communicates. She enters spaces that are conducive to Safi's flourishing as a dog with an exceptional ability to hear, smell, and understand landscapes rather than confine her to human spaces. Within those spaces she respects Safi's excellence and supports its expression by following her decisions and appreciating being introduced to her way of seeing the world.

Emily Pfoutz (2016) offers a similar account of befriending a young horse at a natural horsemanship farm in Costa Rica where horses were free to roam and interact with humans as they chose. The ethos of human-horse relationships in that context was based in understanding and respecting the horse's way of experiencing the world and mode of communication. Horses' evolution as prey animals whose survival depended upon acute awareness of threat and quick responses to subtle indicators of danger were recognised as part of the dignity of horses that humans must negotiate rather than seek to control for their own safety. Humans learned to communicate with horses by using their physical posture and gaze to direct their energy rather than words and aggression, and to behave in ways that invited membership in horses' herds. These approaches stand in contrast to typical practices of isolating horses, assuming control over their basic needs, and conditioning them to accept the futility of resisting human expectations.

Pfoutz is asked to "start"<sup>23</sup> a two year old horse named Fresa, who had no prior physical contact with humans. Initially Pfoutz follows the traditional protocol of capturing the horse and putting a halter around her neck. Her emotional misgivings and the fierce resistance of the horse that made it clear to her that she was violating Fresa's autonomy led Pfoutz to take a different approach. Instead she begins going to Fresa's pasture, offering her grain and settling down with her, reading or singing, not asking for anything from her other than to be there with her. Fresa begins to come to her tentatively, then with more curiosity and responsiveness to Pfoutz's cues for further engagement. What follows is a friendship: the horse chooses Pfoutz's company (which is evident because Fresa was not confined) and invites her to play; the horse develops expectations of Pfoutz and expresses feelings when she does not come through in the rhythm of being together that evolves between

them. Pfoutz describes recognition of Fresa as her own being as critical to the emergence of their relationship. Notably, she experiences this recognition as requiring a total shift in orientation from prioritising her own objectives to creating a space for their mutual encounter:

... in order to work with this mare, I was forced to shift and relax my personal agenda for her. My one-sided goals (to prove myself to my instructor, to train this horse on a specific and relatively urgent timeline) precluded any possibility for equality and spontaneity in our relationship. Beyond literally feeling trapped by the physical halter around her face, she was confined by the attitude I brought to the situation. I was objectifying her as a tool toward achieving my agenda, unwittingly rendering obsolete the value of her existence in its own right. (44)

Pfoutz's account of the relationship that develops between her and this horse echoes a number of descriptions of the embodied connection that riders experience with horses (Maurstad, Davis, and Cowles 2013; Schuurman 2014). It is unique, however, in its lack of reliance on instruments like bits and bridles that habituate horses to human expectations through the threat of pain. She and the horse learn to communicate through subtle physical gestures that enable them to experience one another through riding as well as through running together, playing and lounging in the sun. It may be that Pfoutz's own past experience of learning to be a rider, which relied on mechanisms of control, enabled her to respond to the horse in a way that secured her safety without the standard apparatus of human dominance. Undoubtedly their relationship required some prior understanding of the horse's way of being, but it also required openness to the horse as a co-creator of the relationship between them through which the horse's qualities—and her own—were expressed.

Both of these accounts foreground a practice of relating through what Lori Gruen describes as “entangled empathy” (2015, 2018). Entangled empathy is a process “in which we are attentive to both similarities and differences between ourselves and our own situation and that of the fellow creatures with whom we are empathizing” (2018, 148). Gruen proposes that moving back and forth between one's own perspective and the perspective of the one with whom we are empathising highlights awareness of ourselves as in relationship and preserves the distinctiveness of both the other's perspective and one's own. Effective practice of entangled empathy requires a heightened awareness of one's own perspective and the factors that contribute to one's potential conscious and unconscious responses to a given situation, including past experiences, attitudes, physical vulnerabilities, needs and desires. It also requires careful observation and effort to understand how the other's perspective is shaped by such factors and what supports or impedes the other's capability for security, expression, connection and sense of power in a given situation (2015).

Since many of the encounters between humans and other species occur between beings who have been habituated to capability deprivation in various ways, this practice is a good guide for how humans can begin to

learn how to befriend other species. The trauma and mistreatment that many animals have suffered as a result of relationships with humans—or that are the reason for their presence in human societies—poses significant challenges to the emergence of relationships like that between Smuts and Safi or Pfoutz and Fresa, even if we recognise such relationships as possible between humans and dogs and horses. Humans' learned expectations of dominance over other species and disconnection from modes of being in the world other than their own are also significant obstacles to the emergence of such relationships. Gruen's model offers a mode of encounter that lays the foundation for friendship by attuning humans to their being in the world with others and fostering habits of recognition of the other's uniqueness and the conditions of their flourishing.

Smuts also offers some guidance about friendship with other species as a shared process. She summarises her experiences with a wide range of nonhuman animals into seven discreet stages of friendship. First, animals exhibited an impersonal reflexive response to her as they would to similar stimuli. Second, they sought to discover whether she was a threat, encountering her warily but with interest. Third, they recognised her as an individual and distinguished her from other humans. Fourth, they saw her as a social being capable of communicating. Fifth, motivation emerged to maintain some mutually beneficial relationship. Sixth, the relationship began to be maintained for its own sake. And, seventh, their being together occasionally merged into a single awareness (2001, 306–308). Friendship arises through encounter, security, recognition, communication, discovery and mutuality. It requires extension beyond one's self to see the other as both capable and worthy of sharing a world, and learning to understand and secure the conditions of mutual flourishing.

## Conclusion

Plato's *Lysis* provides an understanding of friendship as a form of belonging based on *difference* through which humans learn to see themselves in a world with valued others, to perceive others' good, and to commit to others' flourishing as their own. The *Lysis* gives us insight into the way that cross species friendship is part of the dignity of human beings, and it reveals how the relationships that shape human perception and action toward other species are crucial to the life conditions that enable the capabilities of those beings. This model of friendship adds nuance to the capabilities approach to justice for all species as developed by Martha Nussbaum by clarifying the conditions for identifying *species norms*, and by characterising the ability to see and support the capabilities of other species as essential human capabilities.



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## Notes

1. Elephants may not be completely weaned until they are ten years old. They are dependent on their mothers for physical and emotional development until the age of five, and like human babies their brains continue to develop in response to stimuli and relationships with their mothers and their herds. See Meyer (2015).
2. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/elephant-leaves-edmonton-zoo-for-breeding-program-1.681372>.
3. [https://www.edmonton.ca/attractions\\_events/edmonton\\_valley\\_zoo/lucy-news.aspx](https://www.edmonton.ca/attractions_events/edmonton_valley_zoo/lucy-news.aspx).
4. See McMillan (2018).
5. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2017) are critical of models of cross species relationships based on mutual feeling and ideas of world sharing. They challenge applications of care ethics and the capabilities approach in particular as providing highly circumscribed views of animals' interests and/or idealising human/animal bonds that contribute to a view of animals as a caste to be used for human interest. A philosophically informed conception of friendship addresses these concerns by establishing recognition of the other as a being with its own good and unique ways of flourishing as a fundamental condition of friendship.
6. All references to the *Lysis* are from Reeve (2006).
7. This concept also appears in Plato's *Symposium* when Diotima says,

I don't think an individual takes joy in what belongs to him personally unless by 'belonging to me' (*oikeion*) he means 'good' The idea is later developed in the Stoic theory of *oikeôsis*, which explains virtue as an extension of what is suitable (*oikeion*) to human nature. The locus classicus for this is Diogenes Laertius. (*Lives* 7.85-89)

In Stoic theory the stages of human development each have an *oikeiosis*, a proper relationship to one's self and surroundings. Maturity involves learning to extend the feelings of care and commitment developed in the small sphere of the family to increasingly different others and complex communities. See Hierocles quoted in Stobaeus 4.671-673. For a wider discussion of the concept, see Joosse (2010, 279-302).

8. See Ludwig (2010, 134-150).
9. Temple Grandin's work reducing fear in slaughterhouse animals so that they go more willingly to their deaths is one well recognised example of this type of persuasion. Stephen Cooke describes the use of trust building practices between humans and laboratory animals to foster the animals' compliance with procedures that cause them serious harm. Cooke discusses the ways that humans use communicative practices that relax the animals' self-protective mechanisms, which he argues is a moral wrong that is not visible in rights language (Cooke 2019).
10. When Socrates does not recognise Lysis's name the men respond, "I'm sure you know what the boy looks like; his looks are enough by which to know him" (204e3-6).
11. See Nichols (2006).
12. He tells the boys, "It is what belongs to one's self, it seems, that passionate love and friendship and desire are directed toward... and if you two are friends with each other, then in some way you naturally belong to each other" (221e).

13. Socrates says, “If there is a difference between belonging and being like, then we might have something to say about what a friend is ... why don’t we agree to say that what belongs is something different from what is like?” (222b).
14. The close connection between humans and dogs is evident cross culturally. Dogs co-exist with humans as companions, hunters, scavengers and something akin to livestock. Different attitudes toward dogs, and the various practices of inclusion or relegation from human communities share an intensity that Serpell argues is tied to their closeness to us as a species:

With the possible exception of some non-human primates (see Dawkins 1993; DiamondBelyaev, 1993) no other species comes as close to us as the dog in affective or symbolic terms, and by the same token, no other species makes a stronger claim to be treated as a human. Yet, far from making the dog the object of universal affection and respect, this unusual ‘closeness’ or affinity seems to provoke a puzzling degree of psychological tension and ambivalence. (2017, 302)

15. Nagasawa et al. (2015) show the primary role of facial cues in regulating the human-dog bond through oxytocin secretion. The “baby schema,” which includes anthropomorphic features, large size and juvenile (neotinous) traits is consistently shown to affect human preferences and attitudes toward animals (Serpell 2004; Borgi and Cirulli 2016). Experiments on silver foxes (Belyaev 1979; Trut 1999) suggest that genetic selection for friendliness in animals can neotenize adult temperament and physical features by altering the genes controlling systems that modulate fear and aggression, such as the HPA axis (Borgi and Cirulli 2016). Other constructions of this process extend more agency to the dogs, regarding the tendency to be less wary and more open to humans to be a factor that led dogs to join human societies in the first place. See, for example, Fuentes and Porter (2018).
16. This type of relationship to dogs (and pets in general) is a growing phenomenon beyond the United States. In China, where Pomeranians and other small fluffy dogs are popular, pet services for the over 73 million pet owners, including hotels, daycare, and grooming centres are a \$25 billion a year industry. This is larger than the tea industry. Pet owners on average spend more per year than the average college graduate earns in a month. Notably, this is occurring in the context of human capability deprivation due to bad air quality and loss of community. See “Once Denounced as Bourgeois Vanity” (2019).
17. See Horse Welfare Issues (2017).
18. Among modes of performance riding, dressage is generally regarded as the least stressful on the horse.
19. See Monks of New Skete (2002).
20. For example, humans are advised,

You have resources—food, treats, toys, and attention. Your dog wants those resources. Make him earn them. That’s the basis of ‘Nothing in Life is Free’.  
When your dog does what you want, he gets rewarded with the thing he wants.

- And, “Stop giving away resources. Do you mindlessly pet your dog for no reason? Stop. Your attention is a valuable resource to your dog. Don’t give it away. Make him earn it.” Humane Society of the United States (2010) cited in Pręgoski (2015).
21. For a broader discussion of this problem in scientific observation see Smuts (2001, 293–309).

22. Sandel argues that attachment to friends is necessary to human self-recognition in the sense that we come into self-awareness through friendship and thus friendship is the ground for liberal choices. See Sandel (1998).
23. “Starting” a horse is a kinder way to describe the process of bringing a horse into a cooperative relationship with humans, also known as “breaking” the horse.

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# KEEPING COMPANY WITH THE GODS: PLATO ON PRAYER AND THE JOURNEY TO THE DIVINE

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The battle we have on our hands is never finished and demands tremendous vigilance. However, gods and spirit are fighting on our side.

-Plato

When we consider the essential traits of philosophy, we might list logic, reason, intellection, or first principles. While these are necessary parts of philosophy, they do not offer a complete description of philosophy as understood by Plato. For Plato, the philosophical life does not just entail thinking or studying but consists of a whole pattern of being. As such, philosophy is not an academic discipline but a spiritual exercise encompassing the whole of life. Nothing should be neglected for the philosopher trying to order their whole life. This entails developing parts of life like virtue, through *ascesis*, control of the passions, and detachment from bodily concerns. Platonic philosophy also requires prayer. Prayer is not a secondary concern for the philosophical life; it is an essential component of being a lover of wisdom. To understand this, one must understand that the philosophical life is an ascent or journey to the divine. The philosopher, who loves wisdom, seeks to become wise and virtuous, which means to become divine. This journey to the divine is not something that a person can achieve on their own. Philosophy is not done in isolation; the philosopher depends on having the right kind of company. This is why we rarely see Socrates philosophize alone and why Plato was quick to establish a school or community of philosophers. The philosopher-in-community cannot be in community with humans (*philosophoi*) alone; we must keep company with the gods (*sophoi*). Keeping company necessitates prayer to the gods; because, prayer, in the broad sense of the term, just is keeping company with the gods. To consider this, we will need to reflect on the aspects of prayer that Plato presents throughout his dialogues. This requires a reflection on the ascent to the divine and what keeping company with the gods means. Further, we will need to consider the relationship of prayer and discourse and how they support each other. Prayer is necessary component of the philosophical life as a keeping company with the gods by interceding for their help so we may pray and reason well, so that through divine education, we will be able to honour the gods by growing to be like them.

## WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? AND WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

In Greek religion, the division between the gods and the human was complex and ambiguous. In one sense, it was strict: mortals could not ascend Olympus, and they could not make themselves divine. The attempt leads to disastrous consequences like Phaeton's ill-fated ride of Helios' chariot. On the other hand, the divine-human divide was not so strict that the gods and



humans did not interact. Further, various figures in Greek mythology were made divine such as Hercules. Michael Morgan describes the religious world of Socrates and Plato as one of great complexity and development due to the rise of mystery cults alongside the traditional sacrificial practices of Greece. He claims that in the Greek tradition there was an ambiguity between the view of 'the gods as distant and powerful, and men as frail and endangered' and the belief 'that flesh-and-blood heroes could attain divine status [which] was long a part of religious culture.'<sup>1</sup> The divide between the divine and human was further complicated by the new cults which saw 'the continuity between human life and the divine' versus the 'conventional ritual sacrifice' which expressed 'a cosmos in which man and the gods are radically separated.'<sup>2</sup> In this mix, we find Socrates and Plato working out a different theology of the ascent of humans to the gods. It should be noted that Plato portrays both religious practices with prayers to traditional Greek gods and references to new cults. Plato lives in this religious milieu, and while he rejects certain aspects of it, he draws from it to rise to a greater understanding of the relationship between the divine and human. Most importantly, he rejects portrayals of the gods in which they commit evil. For Plato, the gods are the truly wise and wholly virtuous. Further, he offers a philosophy that as a human journey to become like gods. The goal was to achieve philosophically what Hercules achieved in the myths. Plato was not offering a secular or rationalist philosophy at all. He proposed a philosophy that is far more religious than many contemporary scholars recognize.<sup>3</sup>

Plato ascribes to the traditional Greek view of the gods as different from humans. This is depicted powerfully in the *Laws* in which humans, who are 'hardly real,'<sup>4</sup> when compared to the gods, are called 'puppets'<sup>5</sup> 'toys'<sup>6</sup> and 'chattel'<sup>7</sup> of the gods. Plato is maintaining the traditional Greek distinction between humans and the divine. This is a kind of drawing into perspective so that we do not commit the sin of hubris, which leads to disastrous interactions with the gods like Phaeton's chariot ride. Hubris, or excessive love of the self, elevates the human above the divine and so commits the worst kind of error. As the Athenian in the *Laws* makes clear 'the cause of each and every crime we commit is precisely this excessive love of ourselves .... Every man must steer clear of extreme love of himself, and be loyal to his superior [the God] instead.'<sup>8</sup> We need to acknowledge the divide between humans and gods and to recognize that our lives are barely serious at all.

However, this is only part of the story. Recognizing that the gods are superior to humans does not mean that humans have no dignity at all. When Clinias calls us puppets and barely real, Megilius responds 'that is to give the human race a very low rating indeed,' Clinias replies 'You must make allowance for me. I said that with my thought on God .... Our species is *not* worthless, but something rather important.'<sup>9</sup> When compared to the divine, we seem unimportant, but this is only by comparison. Like Plato's divided line, we are not speaking of strict division between humans and gods; rather, there is a continuum. For Plato, it is essential that we see both truths. The gods are superior, but we are not worthless. How is this the case? In Plato's philosophical theology, both the gods and humans seek to intellectually apprehend the Ideas themselves by themselves and to circulate around the Good. When the Athenian speaks of virtues he says that virtues 'are part of the spiritual characteristics of the gods, although one can find them quite clearly residing among us too, albeit on a smaller scale.'<sup>10</sup> The gods are fully virtuous and truly wise, which is to say, they are divine. Humans too, can strive to be virtuous and can love wisdom. In part, this is the meaning of the myth of the chariots in the *Phaedrus*. The gods are not substantially different. They too have two horses and a driver and circle the Ideas, but they are fully harmonious and thus do not fall away from the Ideas; whereas, humans are not fully harmonious and so fall away.



The goal of the philosopher is to become like the gods. Alice Von Hildebrand identifies this as the ambition of Plato's philosophy. 'The aim and purpose of life is to resemble God as much as it is humanly possible to do so.'<sup>11</sup> This is why Socrates tells Theaetetus that 'a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pious, with understanding.'<sup>12</sup> Becoming like God is to grow in the wisdom and virtue that the gods possess and that we strive for. This is the core of the distinction between the philosopher, who desires wisdom as something they have a share of but do not have completely, and the sage, who is wise and has wisdom.<sup>13</sup> The gods, daemons, or humans who have ascended to the divine, are truly wise and thus are sages. To ascend requires that we attend to the right things, the really real, and that we understand what it means to be wise. The Athenians tell his interlocutors that 'the *most* important [thing] of all ... is to get the right ideas about the gods, and so live a good life—otherwise, you'll live a bad one.'<sup>14</sup> If we have the right ideas about the gods, we understand that they are superior but also that becoming like them is not unattainable. Han-Georg Gadamer recognized that 'Greek thought includes from its earliest beginnings an element of philosophical theology.'<sup>15</sup> This philosophical theology was oriented towards the 'task of purification' by 'eliminating anthropomorphic elements from these representations of the gods.'<sup>16</sup> This is an essential element of Platonic theology as a reforming theology. Socrates and Plato sought to eliminate the moral distortions of the gods by the poets. This was necessary in order to defend true religion from the atheism of some of the Ionian philosophers. More importantly, having the right idea of the gods is essential to the process of becoming like them. The task is not merely getting the right theology, it is the purification of our minds of false images that make the divine ascent to the gods impossible. Piety is having the right ideas about the divine patterns to which we must cleave.

Plato adopts Greek mythic ideas and deepens them as a metaphor for the philosophical journey to become divine. He explains that: 'I really am trying to "lay down the keel", because I'm giving proper consideration to the way we should try to live—to the "character-keel" we need to lay if we are going to sail through this voyage of life successfully.'<sup>17</sup> The goal is not abstract knowledge but the transformation of the self into the divine. Like Hercules, the philosopher must undergo labors in order to journey to our true destination. Too often, we are going in the wrong direction because we are attending to the wrong paradigm. This is the importance of the opening line of the *Phaedrus* when Socrates questions 'Phaedrus my friend! Where have you been? And where are you going?'<sup>18</sup> Phaedrus has been with Lysis practicing sophistry and thus directing himself away from the divine. Socrates will spend the dialogue seducing Phaedrus on behalf of the god Eros so that Phaedrus will convert to philosophy and thus start going toward the divine. This question is emblematic of Platonic philosophy. It is a metaphor for the necessary conversion of persons from attention on human activities to attention on the divine.

#### AND WHO ARE YOU GOING WITH?

Implicit in the question Socrates asks Phaedrus is a question about what kind of people Phaedrus surrounds himself with. Phaedrus' problem is that he keeps company with Lysis and others who take only human activity as important. They take the lifeless honours of the world seriously, instead of the life filled with the divine. Socrates is inviting Phaedrus to leave Lysis' company and to keep company with him, to be friends. Philosophy is not something that occurs alone.<sup>19</sup> Socrates, surrounded himself with people and Plato founded a school. The dialogues themselves are necessarily enacted in a community.<sup>20</sup> In Platonic philosophy, who we keep company with

is not secondary concern when considering the ascent to the divine. This is why Socrates takes so seriously 'the business of match-making ... with whom they [beginning philosophers] might profitably keep company.'<sup>21</sup> We are meant to philosophize in a community and importantly, we must choose this community wisely.<sup>22</sup> 'It is a decree of fate ... that bad is never friends with bad, while good cannot fail to be friends with good.'<sup>23</sup> This decree is not just a statement of fact but also an admonition. We must choose our company wisely for we will become like them. Thus, the question of 'where are you going?' is equally a question of 'with whom are you going?' And so, at the end of the *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus joins company with Socrates, converting to philosophy from sophistry. David Schenker, while describing this conversion, rightly claims that 'Socrates/Plato has laid bare the shallowness and shortcomings of traditional rhetorical education and has offered a sort of divinely inspired philosophy in its place.'<sup>24</sup> To think of Plato, without considering the divine inspiration of philosophy, is to transform Plato into an earthly rhetorician like those he condemned. Phaedrus say to Socrates 'friends have everything in common' thus recognizing their community and Socrates ends the dialogue by saying 'let's be off.'<sup>25</sup> To be on the way to the Good requires that one be on the way in good company. Phaedrus has left the bad company of Lysis and joined Socrates on the way to the divine together. Their philosophical journey begins with a prayer to Pan; it is this prayer to the gods which Socrates and Phaedrus have in common.

The question of keeping company is not limited to being close to a fellow philosopher or learning from a more advanced philosopher. More importantly, we must keep company with the divine who are truly wise. While we will consider who the *sophoi* are later, for now it is necessary to understand that the gods are the wise.<sup>26</sup> They are the true sages of the Platonic order. Recall the myth of the chariots in Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus*. The gods, led by Zeus, ascend to the place where the gods' minds are 'nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge.'<sup>27</sup> This is 'knowledge of what really is what it is.'<sup>28</sup> There, the gods and spirits have and are the intellectual apprehension of the Ideas themselves by themselves. In this vision, they possess this wisdom fully, are truly wise, and gather in worship around the divine Ideas and the Good. The gods are the true sages, but what about the others? The other souls follow the gods and those who 'follow a god most closely' make themselves 'most like that god'<sup>29</sup> However, some of these souls do not follow closely enough and therefore fall away. Those who fall away, but were relatively close to the god they followed, become philosophers. It is only 'a philosopher's mind' which 'grows wings, since its memory always keeps it as close to those realities [the Ideas] by being close to which the gods are divine.'<sup>30</sup> The gods and other souls, including human souls, are not essentially different and they both depend on the Ideas for being. The difference is in their level of intellection of the Ideas. Furthermore, the souls which fall away, fall because they were not harmonious and were unable to see the Ideas by themselves. They failed to 'follow the god most closely.'<sup>31</sup> The myth goes on to discuss various types of people by the god that they followed. Socrates claims that 'everyone spends his life 'honouring the god in whose chorus he danced, and emulates the god in every way.'<sup>32</sup> Humans, who are not essentially different from the gods, rise to wisdom by following more closely the god in whose chorus they once danced. In Plato's account, the following of gods is a necessary part of becoming wise.

Why is this so? Why would keeping company with the gods matter in the ascent to divinity? In part, because it is the very goal of the human soul. We are meant to be wise as the gods are wise; it is the *telos* of the philosopher. Why should the goal of philosophy, require that the philosopher keep company with the divine along the journey? Plato offers us part of an answer near the end of Socrates' palinode. It is important to remember that this is a palinode to restore his relationship to a god, Eros, with whom Socrates has a special connection, and to establish a rapport with Phaedrus. Socrates states that 'it is the decree of fate ... that bad is never friends

with bad, while good cannot fail to be friends with good.<sup>33</sup> If the goal of philosophy is to go along the way to the divine with fellow lovers of wisdom, then the better company we keep the easier the ascent. Our best traveling companions will be the gods who aid us to become divine.

There is another essential similarity between humans and gods. The reason we seek to be like the gods is so that we can eternally and lovingly gaze on the Ideas and even more so, on the Good. The petition to and worship of the wise gods is meant to make us wise like the gods. In the context of worship, our goal in praying is that we may be able to worship the Ideas and the Good directly as the gods do. We follow in the company of the gods so that we can enter direct intellection of the Ideas and the Good. In this, we see once again that while we are different from the gods, in that our worship is inferior and often misplaced, we are similar, in that we are ordered to doxology.

#### PRAYER AS KEEPING CONSTANT COMPANY WITH THE DIVINE

In the *Laws*, Plato describes this necessary relationship to the gods on the philosophical journey to the divine. In Book IV, Plato writes (Clinias is speaking) that ‘every man must resolve to belong to those who follow in the company of God.’<sup>34</sup> Once again we return to the idea that the company we keep is essential to the good life. But here Plato more explicitly states that this company is not just the company of good men but rather we must be in the company of those who follow the God. Philosophers must follow the gods. But how? To understand this, we must return to the idea that ‘Like approves like.’<sup>35</sup> And since ‘God is ‘preeminently the ‘measure of all things’ we must be like God and in being like God ‘the moderate man is God’s friend.’<sup>36</sup> This clearly requires living the moral life. By advancing in the life of the virtues, which we share with the gods, we become like the gods and become friends with the gods.<sup>37</sup>

This depends on the central importance of friendship. For Plato, friendship is one of the highest goods. In the *Lysis*, Socrates makes clear that he ‘would rather have a good friend than’<sup>38</sup> any other mortal good, and the primary feature of friends is that they ‘want to discuss with each other.’<sup>39</sup> Friendship does not require equality between friends as we can see in Socrates’ friendships with Phaedrus, Theatetus, or even Thrasymachus. Their conversions to philosophy are, in part, a conversion to friendship with a good person who is further advanced in philosophy. Furthermore, true friendship involves mutual growth in wisdom and virtue in the pursuit of the Good. In this, the gods, who are preeminently good, can be friends with the philosopher who strives to be good. This friendship is only possible because they have virtue in common. The philosopher—though not as moderate as a god—shares this virtue, and thus can be a friend with the god. By practicing philosophy and living morally, one can ‘join the company of the gods.’<sup>40</sup> This friendship is not one between equals, and so the philosopher follows in the company of the god, just as young men of virtue followed Socrates and later Plato.

How then do we keep company with the god? Keeping company requires the moral life and philosophy, but in book IV of the *Laws*, Plato puts emphasis on prayer, sacrifice, and worship. He writes:

If a good man sacrifices to the gods and keeps them constant company in his prayers and offerings and every kind of worship he can give them, this will be the best and noblest policy he can follow; it is the conduct that fits his character as nothing else can, and it is the most effective way of achieving a happy life.<sup>41</sup>

Plato is speaking of the good man; whereas the wicked soul is 'wasting their time' praying and worshipping since the god would not receive gifts from the wicked.<sup>42</sup> Prayer is only efficacious when it is a part of the virtuous and philosophic life.

In other places in the Platonic corpus, Plato claims that it is inadvisable for the wicked to pray at all. For instance, in the *Republic*, Plato attacks the wicked for the blasphemous idea that one could bribe the gods. In the *Second Alcibiades*, Socrates advises Alcibiades, who is neither good nor wise, not to pray at all since one may receive an evil thing one prays for.<sup>43</sup> This dialogue, which was probably not written by Plato, should not be taken too literally. Rather than being given what the evil one prays for, the punishment for the wicked who pray is that they are blaspheming in their prayers and so grow in their wickedness. The soul is becoming unlike the gods and, since the affinity with the gods is the gift of the gods, we can say that the wicked at prayer make their situation worse. Socrates tells Alcibiades that it 'would be a strange and sorry thing if gods took more account of our gifts and sacrifices than of our souls and whether there is holiness and justice to be found in them.'<sup>44</sup> However, Socrates does tell Alcibiades that there is one prayer that he could offer, he could pray that the gods will give what is good and noble. At the end of the dialogue, Alcibiades decides not to pray, but then ironically offers a prayer. When thinking about the time when he can someday pray, he says: 'God willing, that day will not be too far off.'<sup>45</sup> Alcibiades offers a prayer that he will soon be able to pray. In his failure to be a moral man, he cannot pray, he cannot keep company with the gods. All he can pray for is that he will become able to pray, to keep company with the gods. Socrates' question at the beginning of the dialogue is now given greater significance. Socrates had asked 'Alcibiades, are you on your way to say your prayers?'<sup>46</sup> Alcibiades' spoken answer is yes, but since he is immoral and does not understand the gods, the correct response is no. It is only when we realize that prayer cannot be detached from virtue and philosophy that we can be *on our way to pray* in the company of the virtuous following the gods.

Nonetheless, such an accent on prayer seems strange. Wouldn't virtue and philosophy alone suffice? Let us return to the passage from the *Laws*. How does Plato describe the activity of keeping constant company with the gods? For the good man, it is through prayer, sacrificial offerings, and all kinds of worship. Plato describes this activity as fitting to the character of the good human. To pray and offer worship to the gods is the activity that is the most natural to the good person. Further, it is the practice that is the *best* way to achieve the happy (*eudaimonia*) life. To pray is the practice that, in the present, is most fitting to the identity of the good person. Further, it is the practice that best guarantees the achievement of happy life in the future. This is not to say that this present-future distinction should be marked too strictly. Farther along in the philosophical journey prayer will still be important, and in the present the good man, in prayer, is happy. We cannot do this without prayer. Robert Mayhew in '*On Prayer in Plato's Laws*' writes that 'It is not enough to emulate the gods and possess reason and other virtues, and to act in accord with the virtues. To do what is dear to the gods, Plato says, one must also *pray* to them for these virtues, and perform the other services consistent with honouring the gods.'<sup>47</sup> Plato maintains the language of a journey in which the gods accompany us along the way to our becoming like them. The future goal is extant in the present striving.

We should also examine the Greek word *εὐδαιμονία* in this passage. Prayer to the gods best guarantees that we will become good (*εὖ*) spirits (*δαιμονία*). Daemons are with the gods, directly contemplating the Ideas. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates says 'it is principally because daemons are wise and knowing (*daēmones*) ... that Hesiod says they are named daemons ('*daimones*')'<sup>48</sup> Here Socrates approves of the etymological history of the word daemon which indicates that to be a daemon is to be wise and knowing, or, in other words, to be a sage. Thus, Socrates claims that Hesiod and the poets 'speak well' when they claim that 'the good man,' when he dies,

'becomes a daemon.'<sup>49</sup> In fact, Socrates claims that the good man, in life, could be called a daemon. Once again, we have the sense that the goal to be achieved is present in the person pursuing the journey to the goal. In addition, as the *Laws* insist, for a good person to become a 'good spirit' requires that he or she pray and worship. Notably, the Athenian continues to say that the good man must pray to a hierarchy that extends from the gods to one's parents. He ranks the divine figures to whom we must pray: the Olympians, gods of the underworld and of the state, and the daemon. The Athenian continues to list heroes, ancestors, and living parents as meriting prayer. This indicates two important things. The first is that piety is a part of justice which gives the 'honour which is due to those superior to us who have given us good things. Secondly, it is important to note that Plato lists this hierarchy not as having a strict division but as a continuum upon which the good person ascends. In ascending, prayer is the most effective way for a good person to be and to become a good daemon, and it is the daemon who most closely follow the gods in the myth of the charioteers.

#### SPEAKING WELL: PRAYER AND PHILOSOPHIC DISCOURSE

As we have seen, in Book IV of the *Laws*, Plato claims that, for the good man, the most fitting and most efficacious activity is prayer and worship. It is by this means that the good man can attain the state of being a good spirit (*daemon*) in the company of gods. This may strike one as odd. For is not philosophy the true route to the divine? To answer this question, we must remember that philosophy for Plato was not an academic discipline, not even the highest academic discipline, it was a way of life. As Pierre Hadot writes, for the Greeks 'philosophy did not consist of teaching an abstract theory—much less in the exegesis of texts—but rather in the art of living.'<sup>50</sup> Prayer is thus a part of the philosophical life and, according to the *Laws*, the most important part. But even this answer seems unsatisfactory. For within the philosophical life, we find a specification of philosophy, the act of reasoning and the participation in dialogue. Isn't the *logos* of philosophy more important than the *euche* of philosophy?

Within Plato's philosophy, are *logos* and *euche* are not truly contrasted. They are both oriented to the same good, the ascent to the divine and the desire for wisdom. Further, they are both intimately connected to words. *Logos* as reasoned discourse between persons occurs through spoken words in order to ascend to intellection. *Euche* as prayers directed to the gods, daemons, and heroes, are the spoken words of individual and groups directed to God for oneself and others in the ascent to the divine. These two different activities are not competing and do not have different ends. One prays for the ability to wisely discourse, and one discourses on the nature of prayer so that one can wisely pray.

Throughout the dialogues, interlocutors (usually Socrates himself) offer prayers that they speak well (εὐ-φῆμι).<sup>51</sup> The process of reasoning about the Ideas is difficult for persons who have fallen so far away from intellection. We need guidance and help in turning away from the many images toward the Ideas themselves by themselves. In the myth of the Cave, the person trapped is 'compelled ... by someone' to turn 'to look at the light itself.'<sup>52</sup> This turning to the Ideas is something that we must pray for in our discourse, otherwise our discourse will turn astray. As Timaeus states, 'Surely anyone with any sense at all will always call upon a god before setting out on any venture, whatever its importance.'<sup>53</sup> And, as Timaeus makes clear, this is especially true of intellectual discourse, which is the most important of our ventures. The need for this prayer continues throughout discourse and the gods 'never neglect anyone who eagerly wishes (*euche*) to become just and who makes himself as much like a god as a human can by virtuous way of life.'<sup>54</sup> The gods help those who make themselves as like the divine as



they are able. But our ability is limited in different ways along the journey to the divine and so the true *sophoi*, who wish to make others like them, helps the *philosophoi* grow in this likeness. And so, we must pray for the guidance and assistance of the gods when we reason and converse. We can see this in the prayer of Timaeus at the beginning of the *Critias*:

My prayer is that he [the god] grant the preservation of all that has been spoken properly; and that he will impose the proper penalty if we have, despite our best intentions, spoken any discordant note .... The proper penalty is to bring him back into harmony .... We pray that he will grant the best and most perfect remedy—understanding.<sup>55</sup>

Even with the best of intentions, we need help to speak well (*eu-pheme*), and sometimes we need to be corrected through the giving of understanding.

However, it is not only discourse that needs prayer; prayer also needs discourse. In the dialogues, Plato discusses the way one ought to pray so that one does not pray poorly, which would be blasphemous (*βλάπτω- φήμι*), but rather pray well.<sup>56</sup> There are two primary dangers in praying without knowledge. The first danger is that in not knowing the good, we may pray for the wrong things (imagine what Phaedrus prayed for before he conversed with Socrates). Discourse also helps us understand the true nature of the gods so that we do not think of them as the poets had presented them. The Athenian explains this ‘if you lack wisdom, praying is a risky business, because you get the opposite of what you want’ due to your ‘ignorance about mankind’s most vital concerns.’<sup>57</sup> This is why Socrates criticizes the poets for their blasphemous portrayals of the gods. In spreading ignorance of the gods, they make prayer risky. We must reason well about the gods and prayer so that we pray for the right things to the real gods.

Both forms of speech, and their accompanying cognitive activity, need the other. To speak and reason well, we must pray well; to pray well, we must speak and reason well. Further, neither occurs exclusively or primarily in isolation from other people. Philosophical reasoning occurs in dialogue with others. Prayers, which are frequently offered in the dialogues, are usually a communal activity or liturgy (*leitourgia*). Neither prayer nor discourse, is prior to the other in importance or chronology. Both are part of the ascent, and we grow in both in concert. Megilius, responding to the Athenian, states ‘you should demand your own way in your prayers (*euche*) only if your wishes (*euche*) are supported by your rational judgment—and this, a rational outlook, should be the object of the prayers (*euche*) and efforts of us all.’<sup>58</sup> Our prayers should be supported by our rational judgment and we should pray for rational judgment. Our prayer and our reasoning must be in co-supportive harmony so that we speak well together on our journey.

#### THE THREEFOLD TASK OF PRAYER AND DISCOURSE

From this we can see that prayer and philosophical discourse work to support each other. But there is a further similarity that ties the two activities of the philosophy even more closely together. To understand this link, we must see the connection that both philosophy and prayer have with worship and sacrifice. While much of this paper has focused on prayer as the request for the good, it should not be forgotten that prayer is deeply linked to both sacrifice and worship. The Athenian, when discussing prayer as constant company with the God, connects prayer as a request, as worship, and as sacrifice. Plato routinely links the three in a manner that indicates that they are inseparable. Each expresses a mode of relationship between the pious person and the gods: to pray is ask for the goods we need to ascend to the divine; to worship is to give the honour due the gods for their giving of good things; to sacrifice is an act of purification or

of repentance for error. Throughout the dialogues, Plato writes prayers that express all three activities.

The most notable instance of the three-fold nature of prayer is the third speech of the *Phaedrus*. The third speech is a palinode that is directed to an imagined beautiful boy, the young man Phaedrus, and the god (or daemon) Eros. The palinode is offered as a purification after the false speech given by Socrates. His palinode is both an act purification and a prayer for purification.<sup>59</sup> Socrates, in his palinode, apologize to Eros and requests forgiveness so that he can still receive the 'gift' of 'expertise at love.'<sup>60</sup> But he does not just apologize, he actually tries to reform himself and turn from his error. He turns away from the false words of the first speech and offers a true speech that honours love. Therefore, the palinode praises Eros and thus is also worship, giving what is due to the god. Finally, Socrates request the good of philosophy for Phaedrus and the continued gift of his own expertise at love. Socrates prays for Phaedrus that he may begin the philosophical journey and that he (Socrates) may continue it. The palinode acts as a prayer in a threefold way. It is a sacrifice given as purification for error, worship as right honour given to the god Eros, and prayer as a request for good. Each aspect of the palinode is inseparable and each acts to restore and deepen Socrates' constant company with the gods.

However, Socrates' palinode is not only a prayer, it is a discourse on philosophy too. In it he offers a myth to explain the relation of the gods and humans to the Ideas and to each other. He expresses how we descend from and ascend to the Ideas. He portrays the real nature of beauty, virtue, and vice. *Socrates' palinode is simultaneously a prayer and a philosophical discourse.* Further, its philosophy parallels the threefold prayer. It is a correction of his previous error; it speaks rightly about the gods and thus honours them and leads Phaedrus to 'honour them; and it seeks the good.

While, the rest of Plato's dialogues do not exactly mirror this palinode, they do to a certain extent. They seek to identify error and to cause the interlocutor to recognize their ignorance, they speak well of the gods and the Good, and they seek the good of wisdom. Some dialogues have a greater accent on one of these aspects of philosophical discourse just as some prayer can be focused on purification, worship, or requests for goods. Importantly, the last aspect of discourse and prayer is present throughout. It is true of all discourse and prayer, which seek the goods of truth, virtue, and wisdom so that the soul may ascend to the Good as source of goods. As such, the search for the good is a part of both purificatory and doxological discourse and prayer.

The primary form of the purification portrayed in the dialogues is aporetic. In the aporetic dialogues, Plato portrays Socrates leading his interlocutor to discover their views are erroneous opinions. This leads the interlocutor to realize that they do not know and to either break off the dialogue (rejecting purification) or convert to philosophy (true purification and conversion). Those who will listen are guided from false speech (*blas-pheme*) to the activity of speaking well (*eu-pheme*).

On the other hand, the aspect of worship is essential to both prayer and discourse within the philosophic life. Worship is both an act of piety that gives the honour due to the gods and it is also the right orientation the soul to the divine. While it seems evident that prayer could take the form of worship, how could philosophy? For Plato, it does so in a variety of ways. First, it should not be forgotten that we are meant to honour the gods, daemons, and heroes. While there is room for traditional Greek understanding of heroes, it seems that Plato is far more interested in philosophers as heroes. In this way, Plato's Socratic dialogues act as praise of Socrates. The dialogues, as eulogies to Socrates, give him the praise that is due to one who has caused such good in others. Further, in praising the good man, they create an exemplar for the one praising and the one considering the praise.



The dialogues themselves praise the gods. For instance, the discussion of Eros in the *Symposium* begins by a decision to sing a 'proper hymn to Love.'<sup>61</sup> What form does this hymn take? It takes the form of a discussion about love. They do not sing; they enter in philosophical discourse. Eryximachus proposes that 'this is a splendid time for all of us here to honour the god ... we can spend the rest of the whole evening in discussion, because I propose that each of us give as good a speech in praise of Love as he is capable of giving.'<sup>62</sup> To participate in philosophic speech-giving and dialogue, is to sing a hymn to the gods. As Catherine Pickstock makes clear, the doxological content of philosophy is its highest content. 'Praise of the beautiful is the supreme ethic, the route to the transcendent good.'<sup>63</sup> This may be why the Athenian describes it as the best and most fitting activity of the philosopher who seeks to become a *eu-daemon*. 'The primal state of the philosopher-lover, which he remembers and strives to recoup, was indeed on of perpetual doxological expression.'<sup>64</sup> Humans desire to be like the gods in that the gods have not fallen from their 'perpetual doxological expression.'<sup>65</sup> Only the philosopher knows how to 'strike up a song in his turn like a free man, or how to tune the strings of common speech to the fitting praise of the life of gods and of the happy [*eudemonia*] among men.'<sup>66</sup> In this sense, the philosopher knows simultaneously how to discourse in honour of the gods and to pray in honour of the gods. Pickstock writes, 'a good discourse is one which is pleasing to the gods and so Plato's palinode in the *Phaedrus* is 'offered as a liturgy, a linguistic gift to the gods.'<sup>67</sup> It is pleasing to the god precisely in rightly honouring them, and, more importantly, in that it honours the Ideas and the Good. We must pray for the ability to discourse; because, when discourse is true, it praises the gods. At its greatest, it joins the gods in praising the Ideas and the Good. The philosophers are the true singers of hymns to the divine in both their prayers and discourses. To pray well and to discourse well ends up being more than complementary, they in fact become identical. Our true prayers are discourses, our true discourses are prayers.

#### SOCRATES' DAEMON

While it seems understandable that both prayer and discourse are essential, co-supportive, and parallel aspects of the philosophic journey to the divine, a final question arises that must be attended to in this discussion. In what way do the gods respond to prayers, specifically petitionary prayers (*euche*)? While there are a variety of legitimate answers (because there are a variety of goods given by the gods) we will focus on just one.<sup>68</sup> Plato believes that the primary goods that we should pray for are wisdom and virtue. But how do the gods, spirits, or heroes give us either? The answer, in part, lies in the third type of soul we are meant to pray to. Plato portrays Socrates as a causer of *aporia*, a gadfly, a midwife, and an educator. In all this, he does not put knowledge in the mind of his interlocutors. Rather, he helps the person to realize their errors; shows them how to speak well; and directs their attention to the good. Socrates describes philosophic pedagogy in Book VII of the *Republic*. He says that human person must be 'turned around from that which is coming into being' to the 'one we call the good' and that requires turning 'the whole soul.'<sup>69</sup> In this description, the soul is portrayed as passive; they are turned. Socrates goes on to say that 'education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it.'<sup>70</sup> It seems evident from the active nature of the dialogues that this learner cannot just be passive but must be engaged; nonetheless, in Plato's account, the educator is essential and active.

What is true of Socrates, is true of the gods and spirits. They act as educators turning the souls of people to the good. Therefore it can be said that in a disordered society 'if anyone is saved and becomes [a philosopher], he has been saved ... by a divine dispensation.'<sup>71</sup> Even in more

just societies, the gods and spirits act as educators and can be said to be 'responsible for the good things ... in our lives.'<sup>72</sup> Socrates is a hero meriting praise because he acts like the gods and, as a divine educator in an all too human world is a 'strange (*atopos*) educator.'<sup>73</sup> The divine educators, unlike human educators who are not strange, give the gift of wisdom to the philosopher at prayer and at discourse.<sup>74</sup>

How is this education effected in a practical sense? The best example the dialogues give is Socrates' daemon. His daemon does not pour knowledge into Socrates' soul; rather, the daemon turns Socrates away from error and in the direction of truth. Here we see the passive and active interplay. The educator turns the student away from error toward truth, but the student must do the hard work of pursuing that truth. Without the educator, they could not turn; however, without their own effort, the turning would not be efficacious. Therefore, Socrates reacts so strongly when Thrasymachus asks 'Am I to make my argument and pour it into your very soul?' Socrates responds 'God forbid! Don't do that!'<sup>75</sup> Such an action is not education and the idea causes Socrates to react strongly with a prayer: 'God forbid'. The true educator, human or divine, turns the student so that they can pursue the good. While this is not the only way that daemon or gods can help humans, it is one important and concrete assistance that Plato portrays. Just as Socrates daemon performs the invaluable function of converting Socrates; so too the gods and daemons (particularly those closest to each person) seek to turn us to the good. In this, they answer our prayers by helping us to join the fellowship of those who follow in the company of the gods as they contemplate the Ideas.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Since late medieval and early modern era, philosophy has been separated from theology and reasoned discourse from prayer. These divisions ought not to be read back into Plato's thought. Rather, we ought to try to read Plato on his own terms and look to his ideas as a source of renewal within philosophy. Specifically, Plato's account of philosophy as a way of life is essential to understanding the true ground of life as a journey to the divine. Plato reminds us that prayer is an indispensable part of this ascent. Neo-Platonists and then Christians saw this and adopted and adapted Plato's thought. Plato's account of prayer should not be neglected. More importantly, it acts as reorientation and renewal of philosophy. Platonic philosophy has a structural orientation to the divine and to the ascent to become like the divine. This ascent cannot be achieved in isolation from others or from the divine. It occurs through the action of keeping company with the gods through prayer and discourse. This is not an optional aspect of Platonic philosophy for 'one *must* utter a prayer to the gods that the journey from here to yonder may be fortunate.'<sup>77</sup> The yonder is the state of the divine intellection of the Ideas and circulation around the Good. Plato continues to invite philosophers and others to convert to this orientation to the divine, a conversion that, by Plato's account occurs through education given to the good person by the gods and daemons in response to good prayers and true discourse, which in turn make it possible to pray and discourse well on the way to the divine.

## Notes

1 Michael Morgan, *Platonic Piety: Philosophy and Ritual in Fourth-Century Athens*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pps. 18 and 19.

2 Morgan, p. 20.

3 Gregory Vlastos in his essay 'Socratic Piety' dismisses the possibility of ignoring 'a fact about Socrates which has been so embarrassing to modern readers that a long line of Platonic scholarship has sought ... to

explain it away: Socrates acceptance of the supernatural.' (p. 55) However, he laments it as due to a failure in Socrates (and Plato) stating that as 'far head of his time as Socrates was in so many ways, in this part [belief in the supernatural] he is man of his time .... Born into this system of religious belief, Socrates, a deeply religious man, could not have shrugged it off.' (p. 56) In this, Vlastos adopts Weberian view of religion as a kind of 'sacrifice of intellect' that only we moderns can avoid. ('Socratic Piety,' *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*. Ed. Nicholas D. Smith. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.)

4 *Laws* Trans. Trevor J. Saunders in *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), X 803c.

5 *Laws* VII 804b.

6 *Laws* VII 803c.

7 *Laws* X 906b.

8 *Laws* V 732a-b.

9 *Laws* VII 804c.

10 *Laws* X 906b.

11 Alice Von Hildebrand, 'Platonism: An Atrium to Christianity.' *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*. 10:2 (Spring 2007), p. 35.

12 *Thaetetus*, trans. M.J. Levett. In *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). 176b. (Hereafter *Thaet.*)

13 Pierre Hadot relates this to the need for humans to know themselves. This is a task only for humans, as the *Apology* makes clear (38a). Humans need to examine themselves because they are searchers who know they do not know and need to recollect; whereas, the gods or the wise fully know themselves and thus do not need to examine themselves. Therefore, as Hadot writes, for humans the goal is 'to know oneself *qua* non-sage: that is, not as a *sophos*, but as a *philo-sophos*, someone *on the way toward* wisdom.' (p. 90)

14 *Laws* X 888b. Italics mine.

15 Han-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 37.

16 Gadamer, 39.

17 *Laws* VII 803b.

18 *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 227a. (Hereafter *Phdr.*). This question is echoed in *Lysis* a dialogue on friendship. Hippothales calls out: 'Hey Socrates, where are you coming from and where are you going?' (203a)

19 Pierre Hadot writes of this dialogic nature of the philosophical life: 'Only he who is capable of a genuine encounter with the other is capable of an authentic encounter with himself, and the converse is equally true.' (p. 91) Philosophy as self-knowledge cannot be separated from knowledge of the other. Neither sameness nor difference can stand alone in either a metaphysical sense or in a dialogic sense. And so 'dialogue can be genuine only within the framework of presence to others and to oneself .... Every spiritual exercise is a dialogue ... as an exercise of authentic presence, to oneself and to others.' (p. 91) The journey is never alone, and it matters a great deal whom we are present with.

20 David Schenker recognizes this difference. He writes 'traditional rhetoric is seriously flawed and ... a better alternative is available, in the communion of souls through, love, pedagogy, and philosophy.' (p. 80) The true love of philosophy unites Socrates with Phaedrus as fellow travelers on the way. *Lysis*' contractual rhetoric offers only human accomplishments and contractual relationships. Only in philosophy, does one find true relationships based on *philia* for each other and *eros* for the good.

21 *Thaet.* 151b.

22 Plato claims in the *Lysis*, that 'God himself makes peoples friends, by drawing them together. (*Lys.* 214a) God is the true matchmaker, and Socrates, seeking to be like the gods, also acts as a matchmaker.

23 *Phdr.* 255b. Christianity will overturn the inability of goodness companioning with badness in Jesus' choice to be with sinners rather than the righteous.

24 David Schenker, 'The Strangeness of the *Phaedrus*.' *American Journal of Philology*. 127 (2006), p. 75.

25 *Phdr.* 279c.

26 As Socrates says in *Apology*, 'in fact the god is wise .... And human wisdom is worth little or nothing.' (23b.)

27 *Phdr.* 247d.

28 *Phdr.* 247e.

29 *Phdr.* 248a.

30 *Phdr.* 249c.

- 31 *Phdr.* 248a.
- 32 *Phdr.* 253d.
- 33 *Phdr.* 255b.
- 34 *Laws* IV, 716b.
- 35 *Laws* IV 716c.
- 36 *Laws* IV, 716d.
- 37 Alice von Hildebrand states that Plato had ‘perceived that man’s moral conduct should be in conformity with the divine.’ (p. 33)
- 38 *Lysis*, Trans. Stanley Lombardo. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) 211e. (Hereafter *Lys.*)
- 39 *Lys.* 75d.
- 40 *Phaedo*, G.M.A. Grube. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) 72c.
- 41 *Laws* IV 716d-e.
- 42 *Laws* IV 716e.
- 43 *Second Alcibiades* was probably not written by Plato but by an early Platonist in the Academy. Its similarities to the rest of the dialogues indicate that it corresponds with the Plato’s thought. It is a kind of early secondary source that helps elucidate Plato’s thought on prayer.
- 44 *Second Alcibiades*, Trans. Anthony Kenny. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 149e. (Hereafter *Alc. II*)
- 45 *Alc. II.* 151b.
- 46 *Alc. II* 138a.
- 47 Robert Mayhew *On Prayer in Plato’s Laws, Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*. 41:1 (2008). 49.
- 48 *Cratylus*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 398c. (Hereafter *Crat.*)
- 49 *Crat.* 398c.
- 50 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Trans. Michael Chase, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 83.
- 51 Robert Mayhew writes that ‘Prayer is appropriate ... not only because acting in accordance with reason is crucial to a good life, but also because it is difficult to do.’ (p. 50) To live according to reason (and this includes philosophic discourse) is an activity of life that humans cannot achieve alone. We must ask for help in prayer because *we need help*.
- 52 *Republic*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), VII 515e. (Hereafter *Rep.*)
- 53 *Timeaus*, Trans. Donald J. Zeyl. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 27c.
- 54 *Rep.* X 613b.
- 55 *Critias*, Trans. Diskin Clay. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 106b. (Hereafter *Cri*).
- 56 The Greek word for prayer, εὐχή, contains the Greek root word for good, εὖ. The orientation to the good is contained within the very meaning and etymology of *euche*. The definition offered for prayer in the Platonic *Definitions* is the ‘request by men to the gods for what is good or seems good’ (415b).
- 57 *Laws* 688c-688d.
- 58 *Laws* III 687e.
- 59 The wicked, in book II of the *Republic*, persist in their evil and think they can bribe the gods to get out of their just punishment. A true prayer of repentance requires a change of moral direction.
- 60 *Phdr.* 257b.
- 61 *Symposium*, Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). 177c. (Hereafter *Symp.*)
- 62 *Symp.* 177d.
- 63 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: on the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 45.
- 64 Pickstock, p. 45.
- 65 Pickstock, p. 40.
- 66 *Tht.* 176a.
- 67 Pickstock, p. 40.

68 Mayhew writes 'Plato held that it is proper to pray not only for goods of the soul, but also (in some cases) for material goods, so long as what is prayed for is consistent with wisdom and other virtues.' (p. 50) It is important to note, that these material goods, in being consistent with wisdom and virtue, are, indirectly, goods for the soul.

69 *Rep.* VII 518c.

70 *Rep.* VII 518d.

71 *Rep.* VI 492e.

72 *Rep.* II 379c.

73 *Rep.* VI 493c.

74 Catherine Pickstock writes that 'citizenship of the psychic polis is achieved through steadfast commitment to the good, but this itself arrives in answer to a pray, as a divine gift.' (p. 46) This requires both the activity of the recipient and more importantly the activity of the gods. It means a 'perpetual renewal of a particular mode of life [the philosophic journey] dialectic in character [discourse], sustained through acts of liturgy [prayer.]' (p. 46) Since, the activity of discourse and of prayer are both a gift, philosophy itself has 'the character of gift.' (p. 46) A gift for which we must offer thanks in the activity of worship.

75 *Rep.* I 345b.

76 It is this trait of education as conversion that Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith miss in their discussion of Socrates' daemon. Brickhouse and Smith, quoting Socrates in the *Apology*, argue that the daemon offers a 'kernel of indisputable truth' which is 'virtually worthless' as a general guide to making judgments about right and wrong, for it provides 'next to nothing' in the way of information.' (p. 86) Brickhouse and Smith seem to have missed the irony in Socrates' description of his daemon. In preventing Socrates from committing moral or philosophical errors, the daemon provides an indispensable guide because it acts as an educator. Just like Socrates, the daemon does not pour knowledge into the soul of others but acts as a guide and midwife for the activity of the pupil. Just imagine how helpful it would be to have an infallible spirit who warns us every time we are going the wrong way! (. 'Socrates God and the Daimonion.' *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*. Edited by Nicholas D. Smith. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.)

77 *Cri.* 54b. Italics mine.

# PLATO'S *GORGIAS*: EXPOSING THE SPIRITUAL CORRUPTION OF A RESPECTABLE MAN

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*I think the mind as well as the body can be in the kind of condition*

*which makes it seem to be in a good state when it really isn't at all.*

Plato's *Gorgias* begins with Socrates' arrival outside the venue where Gorgias, the venerable father of rhetoric, has just entertained an enthusiastic crowd with a display of his vaunted rhetorical skill. He encounters Gorgias, Polus, an author of rhetorical textbooks, and Callicles, an aspiring politician and Gorgias' host. A series of conversations ensues: a first, brief one with Gorgias about the aims of rhetoric; then a longer one with Polus about justice and injustice; and, finally, a still longer conversation with Callicles about the best life. Gorgias is depicted by Plato as vain, conventional, and compliant, Polus as less conventional, indignant, thin-skinned, and volatile, Callicles as shameless, self-indulgent, and menacing.

## I. FOUR UNUSUAL FEATURES OF PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

The *Gorgias* is one of the longest dialogues, and it has several unusual features that present the reader with a series of puzzles. First, there is controversy surrounding its *skopos*. The earliest commentators and even some modern ones take it to be rhetoric, its nature, and deficiencies. According to Tarrant, pre-Neoplatonic interpreters generally took the target of the *Gorgias* to be rhetoric: Charmadas, Crassus, Sextus, Thrasyllus, Theon of Smyrna. As early as the first century, Thrasyllus gave the dialogue the predisposing subtitle, *On Rhetoric*.<sup>1</sup> Among the modern commentators, Ast, Socher, Stallbaum, Fouillée, Croiset, Irwin, and Nichols identify the *skopos* as rhetoric. Later commentators, less enamored of rhetoric, like Olympiodorus, claim that the *skopos* is something more fundamental and that the proper reading is a moral one.<sup>2</sup> In addition to Olympiodorus, Schleiermacher, Mill, Woolsey, Cope, Thompson, Lodge, Helmbold, Hamilton, Waterfield, and Arieti affirm a more fundamental *skopos* and the appropriateness of a moral reading. If the *skopos* is rhetoric, why does Gorgias play only a minor supporting role? If the moral reading is more appropriate, why is the dialogue named for Gorgias instead of for Polus or, as would seem even more appropriate, for Callicles?

Secondly, some who prefer the moral reading have suggested that the dialogue may have been written by a Plato deeply angered by a revisionist account of Socrates' conviction and execution circulated by Polycrates while Plato was away from Athens. Plato might be attempting to set the record straight by depicting and exposing the real reason for Socrates' fate. This is the position held, for example, by Schleiermacher, Hamilton, and Arieti.<sup>3</sup> If the *Gorgias* is indeed



Plato's exposition of the reason for Socrates' conviction and execution, what is that reason, and why does it require such an elaborate exposition?

Thirdly, no other Platonic dialogue is so emphatically refutatory and polemical. The *Gorgias* opens with an allusion to war and battle and develops into open hostility between Socrates and Callicles.<sup>4</sup> The *Gorgias* is the only dialogue in which Socrates is explicitly ridiculed and physically threatened and in which his familiar and often amusing irony virtually collapses into nasty sarcasm and debasing insults and his mediating midwifery gives way to vehement monologues that seem to contradict his own insistence that Gorgias and Polus control their rhetoricians' propensity for *makrologia*.<sup>5</sup> In the end, Socrates, in seeming desperation, appeals to an eschatological myth and threatens Callicles with judgment in the afterlife by judges immune to rhetorical flattery and political dissimulation.<sup>6</sup> While it is not unusual for Plato's Socrates to fail to convince or convert his interlocutors, no other dialogue concludes with such a hostile and evidently insuperable deadlock.<sup>7</sup> Fussi observes that the tone of 'disillusioned bitterness' that permeates the dialogue is widely acknowledged but 'never analyzed, accounted for, or adequately justified.'<sup>8</sup> What is the source of the deep antipathy between Socrates and Callicles? Why can't the gap separating them be bridged by reasonable argument and discussion?

Fourthly, Callicles is the only figure in Plato's dialogues, other than the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*, of whom no historical traces have been found. Is Callicles untraceable because he didn't survive long enough to make a name for himself, or because he is a purposeful invention? And, whether or not he actually lived, what does Callicles, certainly the most prominent and memorable character in a dialogue named for Gorgias, represent?

## II. A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE *GORGIAS*

Let's turn now to a fifth feature of the *Gorgias* that has puzzled commentators, viz., the dialogue's unusual structure that comprehends the other four features. The *Gorgias* consists of Socrates in three consecutive conversations with three distinct but related interlocutors. Various accounts of the relations of the three conversations and interlocutors to one another and to Socrates have been proposed but, to my mind, none resolves adequately the puzzles I've outlined. I shall propose here a way of understanding the structure of the *Gorgias* that may help us answer the questions raised by the other four unusual features. My interpretation has been intimated in Plato scholarship but, to my knowledge, has never been articulated explicitly and seriously proposed.

I shall not claim, however, that the interpretation I propose is *the correct reading* of Plato's *Gorgias*. A classic like the *Gorgias* admits a wide range of thoughtful interpretations. Each fresh perspective typically reveals new and previously unnoticed veins of meaning and displays in a new light familiar features of the work and longstanding puzzles surrounding it. I propose this new interpretation in the interest, not of refuting or displacing others, but of complementing them and augmenting our understanding of the dialogue and the aims of its author. Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve's definition of a classic should be kept in mind:

A true classic. . . is an author who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, and caused it to advance a step; who has discovered some moral and not equivocal truth, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered; who has expressed his thought, observation, or invention, in no matter what form, only provided it be broad and great, refined and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in his peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style new without neologism, new and old, easily contemporary with all time.<sup>9</sup>



The Neoplatonist Olympiodorus tried to solve the structural puzzle by appealing to Aristotle's causes and to Plato's account of the tripartite soul. He argued that the three conversations concern, respectively, the creative, formal, and final causes of constitutional well-being whose material cause is the tripartite soul.<sup>10</sup> Socrates discusses the creative cause with Gorgias (Is it rhetoric or philosophy?), the formal cause with Polus (Is it injustice or justice?), and the final cause with Callicles (Is it pleasure or the good?).<sup>11</sup> He also correlates the interlocutors, Socrates included, with the parts of the soul identified in the *Republic*.<sup>12</sup> He implies an affinity with *nous* in Socrates who is 'intelligent and knowledgeable,' and with misguided *nous* in Gorgias who is 'not entirely dominated by injustice' but 'wavering over whether to be persuaded or not,' an affinity with *thumos* in Polus who is an "unjust [character] bent solely on ambition," and an affinity with *epithumia* in Callicles who is "swinish and pleasure-loving."<sup>13</sup> Olympiodorus, as Harold Tarrant notes, is still interested, like the pre-Neoplatonic interpreters of the *Gorgias*, 'to salvage a reasonable image of rhetoric from Plato's hostile text.'<sup>14</sup> To this end, he emphasizes Gorgias' surface affinity with *nous* and ignores his deeper affinity with *epithumia* and the pursuit of pleasure and power. He doesn't declare either Gorgias or Polus to be governed, like Callicles, by *epithumia* but regards Gorgias as merely unclear, externally-motivated, and compliant and Polus as merely logically inconsistent. He seems to regard them as actually less corrupt than Callicles and not merely more oblivious to their corruption.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars have objected that Olympiodorus' appeal to the tripartite soul is an anachronism; it doesn't appear explicitly in Plato until the *Republic*.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, while no one would dispute the affinity of Socrates with *nous* and of Callicles with *epithumia*, to connect Gorgias to *nous* seems tendentious. While the reliance of the rhetorician on the power of the word does suggest an affinity with *nous*, the rhetorician's employment of the word to appeal to the listeners' appetites suggests, as Socrates argues in the *Gorgias*, that this is a merely apparent affinity of a counterfeit art which lacks a rational basis.<sup>17</sup> If Gorgias is related to *nous*, it is to instrumentalized *nous* tethered, not to the true and the good but, as he says himself, to the desire for freedom for himself and power over others.<sup>18</sup> Still, while it is difficult to show an unequivocal correspondence of Socrates' interlocutors with the three parts of the soul, it would also be wrong to claim that Plato doesn't have the soul's well-being, and even the eventual tripartition, in mind. Plato always has the well-being of the soul in mind, from the earliest Socratic dialogues to the unfinished *Laws*, and anyone familiar with the tripartite division of the soul in the *Republic* will be reminded of it, as Olympiodorus was, by Socrates' three interlocutors. Even if Plato's conception of the tripartite soul wasn't fully formed when he wrote the *Gorgias*, it was probably gestating. Olympiodorus' effort to solve the structural puzzle by declaring the *skopos* to be constitutional well-being, by identifying the matter, as it were, of the *Gorgias* as the soul, by linking the three conversations with the creative, formal, and final causes of the well-being of the soul and correlating them roughly with the three parts of the soul should be taken seriously.

I agree with Olympiodorus' position that constitutional well-being is fundamentally what the *Gorgias* is about. That is not to say that the dialogue isn't also about rhetoric and other things as well. But to be interrogated about one's stance regarding rhetoric and philosophy, justice and injustice, happiness and unhappiness is to be forced to reveal, even possibly unbeknownst to oneself, one's normative or aberrant constitution. When we discuss these topics at any length, eventually we have to lay our morality or immorality on the table. All the topics discussed in the *Gorgias*, and all those that have been proposed by commentators as the *skopos* of the *Gorgias*, are, according to Olympiodorus, subordinate to and serve the exposition of the more fundamental issue of constitutional normativity and aberration.

But I think Olympiodorus' position needs to be qualified. The needed qualifications are intimated by E. R. Dodds. Dodds suggests, first, that the interlocutors are not three distinct

forces confronting Socrates but three successive developments of a single force.<sup>19</sup> Each subsequent interlocutor is less polite, more intense, more vehement, less inhibited by the constraints imposed by conventional views of right and wrong, more shameless, more threatening to Socrates, and more dismissive of reasonable argumentation. He suggests further that we should regard ambitious Polus as the spiritual heir of venerable, urbane, vain, complacent, somewhat muddled, and conventionally constrained Gorgias and that we should regard the more clear-headed, shameless and unconstrained Callicles as the spiritual heir of the also still somewhat confused and conventionally constrained Polus. But Dodds doesn't identify the single force that binds the interlocutors; nor does he say precisely what he means by 'spiritual heir' but simply notes that each subsequent conversation 'broadens and deepens' the discussion. Callicles does seem to have more spiritual depth, in some sense, than Gorgias and Polus, insofar as he seems to have a clearer grasp of his motivations. Socrates praises Callicles' frankness.<sup>20</sup> Callicles is quite capable of saying who he is, unlike Gorgias who is happy to let Polus answer for him when the question is posed to him in the opening moments of the dialogue.<sup>21</sup> However, this depth is that of spiritual depravity, not of spiritual health, for out of that depth there emerges an archetypal justification of injustice (442c-486c). Dodds, like Olympiodorus, does draw our attention, however, to a dynamic movement in the dialogue from the superficial to the fundamental.

I agree with Dodds that the three interlocutors represent just one force, that they are spiritually akin, and that there is a discernible movement from Gorgias' muddled and superficial grasp of the motivations for his chosen way of life to Callicles' clear and fundamental account of natural right. But I would identify the single force that binds the interlocutors as the self-indulgent desire for pleasure and for the power that guarantees it. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are spiritually akin inasmuch as they are all animated, so to speak, by *epithumia*. Commentators on the *Gorgias* typically have hesitated to be as critical of Gorgias as they are of Callicles. Aristophanes did depict him as a barbaric sycophant. Aristotle regarded him as a gaudy but inept stylist. But, as Philostratus reports, these critics were in the minority in antiquity.<sup>22</sup> The majority held him and rhetoric in high esteem and failed to ask what moved Gorgias in his depths. As the attention of commentators shifted from the first to the second and third conversations in the dialogue and the infatuation with rhetoric and sophistry diminished, more commentators adopted the moral reading of the dialogue.<sup>23</sup> But, even those who adopt the moral reading have continued, for the most part, to treat Gorgias with kid gloves, exhibiting reluctance to declare the father of rhetoric corrupt, perhaps partly because of the apparent contrast of his personality with that of Callicles. Among contemporary commentators, Nussbaum stands virtually alone as dismissing Gorgias as morally objectionable. In fact, postmodernists generally look with favor upon Gorgias as 'a precursor of our own Third Sophistic.' Consigny, for example, praises him for adopting the position that truth is what a community finds persuasive.<sup>24</sup>

I would qualify Dodds' description of the dynamic movement of the dialogue, then, in two important ways. First, the movement from superficial to fundamental is not only from surface to depth but also, as Fussi has observed, from 'outside' the place where Gorgias has just performed into 'a claustrophobic interior which lacks light and does not promise any light in the future.'<sup>25</sup> I think this smothering interior is actually Callicles' spiritual core. Fussi also points to the symbolic significance of Callicles' invitation to Socrates, as the dialogue opens, to visit him in his house where Gorgias is staying.<sup>26</sup> As Waterfield, too, suggests when he observes that the *Gorgias* is about our inner life as much as our outer, political life, the movement from surface to depth is not merely a shift of the discussion from less to more fundamental topics, but notably a movement from the external to the interior.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, while there is a movement inward from Gorgias' brightly-lit public display, through Polus' confused and weakly-illuminated defense of injustice, to the dark interior of

Callicles, the dynamic movement of the dialogue does not cease there. The inward movement is just a prelude to an inverse movement, from depth to surface and from inside to outside – a movement from Callicles' dark spiritual core of selfish autonomy, through Polus' heteronomous ambition and competitiveness, to Gorgias' smug, pseudo-noetic crowd-pleasing demonstrations of rhetorical prowess. Dodds, who discerns only the initial movement from surface to depth and interprets that movement as conceptual and topical, would have us regard Polus as the spiritual heir of Gorgias, and Callicles as the spiritual heir of Polus. But, the only thing Callicles might be said to inherit and derive from watching Gorgias' displays and by reading Polus' textbooks is rhetorical skill and an appreciation of the tools of persuasion, an inheritance that cannot be equated with greater profundity. We have no difficulty, however, identifying a weightier inheritance in the opposite direction by Polus and Gorgias from Callicles that is a movement both from depth to superficiality and from inside to outside. Callicles' explicit understanding of what it is for him to be naturally himself, his related identification of himself with *epithumia*, and the displacement and subordination of the desire for the true and the good by the desire for pleasure and power constitute the deep roots and interior ground both of Polus' unreasonable preference for wrong-doing over being wronged and of Gorgias' unreflective enthusiasm for the liberating and empowering capacity of rhetoric. If we consider that Gorgias is certainly elderly and Callicles relatively young,<sup>28</sup> we can regard the movement from depth to surface and from inside to outside as the insidious presence of a spiritual malady acquired early in life and shrouded as time passes by a veil of decorum and a crowd-pleasing counterfeit of the good life. The mistaken self-understanding and the consequent self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure and power are the spiritual inheritance that the Calliclean soul bequeaths to Polus and to Gorgias. In fact, the rhetorical training Gorgias provides Callicles can be regarded as itself a vestige of that tainted inheritance Gorgias received from Callicles. At the core of the apparently venerable, well-respected, accomplished orator is the corrupt spirituality that is anchored in and justified by Calliclean self-understanding. Commentators typically have regarded Gorgias as the point of origin of the dynamic movement of the dialogue, and so it seems, given the dialogue's title and the sequence of the conversations. But there are good reasons to think that it is Callicles who is the real spiritual principle of motion in the dialogue.

Socrates' interlocutors, then, may not only be animated by a single self-indulgent spirit but may also actually represent a single antithetical personality with different layers distinguished by different degrees of self-clarity. We may suppose Plato in the *Gorgias* to be peeling the layers of the personality of the title character, Gorgias, as one peels an onion, to reveal Gorgias' animating spirit, his internal constitution, and his relationship to himself, all of which are hidden not only from the crowds who clamor to hear him but also from himself. Peel away the apparently noetic surface layer of seemingly respectable Gorgias who is oblivious to his own psychic corruption to expose the thumic indignation, ambition and competitiveness of appetite-governed Polus who is not quite as oblivious as Gorgias to his own corrupt spirit; peel away the volatile Polus-layer to reveal the epithumic layer of threatening, shameless, misanthropic and manly Callicles who believes himself to grasp clearly what it is to be naturally himself and affirms proudly the corrupt spirit that animates him. Callicles may represent the deepest layer of the constitution of the seemingly respectable but actually corrupted Gorgias, the bedrock of a corrupted spirit or, as Socrates puts it himself in the *Gorgias*, the touchstone against which the golden soul is tested for its purity.<sup>29</sup> Olympiodorus' assertion that the matter of the *skopos*, constitutional well-being, is the soul and his rough correlation of the interlocutors with the three parts of the soul actually implies this interpretation of the structure of the *Gorgias*.<sup>30</sup> But Olympiodorus didn't consider the possibility that Plato is unveiling a single

personality and, consequently, he didn't discern the ongoing, inverse movement of the dialogue from inside to outside and from depth to surface.<sup>31</sup>

### III. REVISITING THE FOUR PUZZLES

Now let's revisit the four puzzles with which I began and consider briefly what light this new perspective on the structure of the *Gorgias* might shed on them.

First, why is the dialogue named for Gorgias who plays the smallest role? Why wasn't it named for Polus or Callicles? It is true, as Olympiodorus held, that the *skopos* is constitutional well-being.<sup>32</sup> More precisely, though, the *skopos* is constitutional aberration. But it is also the problem posed by the *masking* of the inherited spirit of Calliclean corruption.<sup>33</sup> The dialogue is named for Gorgias, then, because he is the apparently respectable character within whom there lurks fundamental disorder to be exposed. It is Dodds' view that the dialogue is called *Gorgias*, and not *Callicles*, because 'Gorgias' teaching is the seed of which the Calliclean way of life is the poisonous fruit.' I am suggesting, on the contrary, that Gorgias' teaching and practice is the fruit of the disordered Calliclean soul.<sup>34</sup> Gorgias plays the smallest role, because Plato's aim is to peel off the deceptive surface of Gorgias' personality and to expose him and his rhetorical skill as a mask that conceals a corrupt Calliclean core.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, if the *Gorgias* is indeed Plato's exposition of the real reason for Socrates' trial and execution, what is that reason, and why is its exposition so complex? The real reason seems to be, at once, the aberrant spirituality of the Calliclean soul, its deceptive capacity to imitate respectability, and Socrates' ability to discern and expose the corruption beneath the veneer of respectability. Psychological iniquity, Socrates claims, is the worst thing in the world, because it causes more harm than anything else.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the mind, says Socrates, 'can be in the kind of condition which makes it seem to be in a good state when it really isn't at all.'<sup>37</sup> Socrates was eliminated by Athenian authorities because he was able to do to them just what Plato, in the dialogue, does to Gorgias. He was able to expose what Plato, in the *Republic*, calls the true lie or the lie in the soul.<sup>38</sup> The problem posed by the earthly masking of spiritual corruption is highlighted at the end of the dialogue when Socrates recounts an eschatological myth and quotes Zeus: 'The reason why the administration of justice is poor at the moment is that people are being assessed with their clothes on' by judges who themselves are clothed. Recall Socrates' depiction of rhetoric, in his conversation with Polus, as the pseudo-art or counterfeit art which poses as administration of justice, the highest art of the soul. In Socrates' telling of the myth, Zeus' improvement upon Kronos' laws is characterized, as Fussi notes, by 'the possibility to abstract from deceiving appearance and the discovery of truth about the soul.' Those being judged can no longer rely upon the judges' dependence on appearance.<sup>39</sup> To display the Calliclean depths of Gorgias' personality, to reveal beneath the superficial layers the tainted Calliclean legacy, requires something like a phenomenological psychology that enables us to judge the purple-robed Gorgias unclothed.<sup>40</sup> The dialogue, then, isn't just an exposition but also a symbolic display of the reason for Socrates' execution.<sup>41</sup> This is a complex and artful task that requires more than a single interlocutor and more than the usual amount of time.

Thirdly, what is the source of the deep antipathy between Socrates and Callicles? Why can't the gap separating them be bridged by reasonable argument and discussion? The antipathy is rooted in the radical opposition between the healthy, well-ordered soul and the diseased, disordered soul. As Callicles remarks to Socrates, '...[I]f you're serious, and if what you're saying really is the truth, surely human life would be turned upside down, wouldn't it? Everything we do is the opposite of what you imply we should be doing.'<sup>42</sup> What is up for Socrates – true,

good, freedom, justice – for Callicles is down – false, evil, slavery, injustice. The gap that separates them can be closed only by a moral inversion which replaces governance by *epithumia* with governance by *nous*. Neither Socrates nor Callicles can be inverted, or converted, by the other, because both are convinced that they've understood correctly what it is to be naturally themselves. Their conflicting self-understandings arise from the fact that the soul, whether conceived as bipartite or tripartite, is constituted by two always tensely related and often conflicting orientations, that of *nous*, on the one hand, and that of *epithumia*, on the other. When Callicles, upon turning inward, discovers the two desires, he dismisses the desire for the true and the good as merely conventional, defines himself narrowly by the pursuit of pleasure which he regards as natural, and ridicules self-control. Socrates, in contrast, admits both orientations as natural, affirms an interior tension in human living, advocates a hierarchical ordering of desires with *nous* controlling and *epithumia* controlled, and rejects licentiousness.<sup>43</sup> Callicles says to Socrates, 'By self-discipline you mean folly,' to which Socrates replies, '... I mean no such thing.'<sup>44</sup> Rational appeals have no appeal to a mind that has become an instrument of non-rational appetite.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, is Callicles untraceable because he didn't survive long enough to make a name for himself or because he is a purposeful invention by Plato? And, whether real or an invention, what does Callicles represent? Some commentators opine that he did exist (*e.g.*, Dodds) but not for long (*e.g.*, MacDowell). Others speculate that he may be a mask for one or another better-known character (*e.g.*, Taylor), although Plato wasn't reluctant in other dialogues to identify by their real names figures of whom he painted unflattering portraits. Still others speculate that he might be a purposeful epitome of the tyrannical man depicted in the *Republic*.<sup>46</sup> Weight is lent to this view by the fact that the name 'Callicles' means 'beautiful one' or 'called beautiful' and, in the *Republic*, Plato describes the tyrant, with heavy irony, as 'the most beautiful of men.'<sup>47</sup> From this new perspective which regards Gorgias as heir to the corrupt Calliclean spirit, then, it would not be surprising to discover that Callicles is in fact a fictional depiction of the epitome of spiritual aberration. Already, insofar as the Socrates of the *Gorgias* is no longer the historical Socrates of the early dialogues, he too may be regarded as at least partially a fictional depiction of the epitome of spiritual well-being. In contemporary terms, Socrates can be regarded as the ideal type of the authentic soul and its normative orientation, and Callicles as the ideal type of the inauthentic soul that is carried by the currents of insatiable *epithumia* toward tyranny.

I conclude with an apposite observation by Olympiodorus:

Callicles says [to Socrates, regarding Gorgias, at 447b], 'Whenever you wish, come into the house and I will make him give a performance.' From this once again Gorgias' external motivation is evident. For Callicles talks about him, as if this was the reason why he was entertaining him in his house: so that whenever he wishes he can make him put on a performance.<sup>48</sup>

Olympiodorus' observation captures not only the downward and inward movement of the *Gorgias* into the corrupt Calliclean depths – symbolized here as entering Callicles' house, but also the inverse upward and outward movement from the corrupt depths to a surface display of respectability – dramatized here by Callicles' claim to be able to activate at will Gorgias' rhetorical displays, that is to say, by his claim to be the very soul or activating principle of the admired and respected rhetorician. Olympiodorus, Dodds, and the other commentators on Plato's *Gorgias* have neglected the inverse movement and so have failed to notice the irony in the very structure of the dialogue. It appears that Gorgias is Callicles' teacher when, in reality, he is Callicles' puppet.



## Notes

Socrates, speaking to Gorgias, *Grg.* 464a. All quotations from the *Gorgias* in the text and footnotes have been translated by Robin Waterfield.

1 See Harold Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* (London: Duckworth 2000). See also *n.* 32 below.

2 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*, trans. Robin Jackson, Kimon Lycos & Harold Tarrant (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1988), 68.

3 See the discussion of Polycrates' pamphlet, 'Accusation of Socrates,' in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*, eds. John Bussanich and Nicholas D. Smith (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), Chapter 13. E. R. Dodds senses Plato's rage about Socrates' execution but rejects the idea that the dialogue was composed at that early date. See Dodds' discussion of the date of composition of the *Gorgias* in *Plato, Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 26 ff. The many allusions to things Sicilian in the *Gorgias*, in addition to the presence of the Syracusan Gorgias himself, suggest that the dialogue was written after Plato's year-long visit to Sicily. Dodds doesn't conclude either that the dialogue preceded or succeeded the appearance of Polycrates' pamphlet.

4 447a.

5 Plato tells us that Callicles is the only Athenian among the three interlocutors and that he hails from the deme of Acharnae whose inhabitants Pindar described as stout soldiers. It was the largest deme in Athens and supplied three thousand hoplites for the Peloponnesian War. See Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, trans. with a commentary by J. G. Frazer (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1898), 415. See *Grg.* 505d where Callicles calls Socrates a bully and suggests he answer his own questions. With the re-emergence of interest in ancient Sophistry in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the rhetorical reading again rose to prominence and both the polemical quality of the dialogue and the radicality of Callicles' opposition to Socrates were downplayed. Leonardo Bruni, for example, in the dedicatory preface to his Latin translation of the *Gorgias*, 'tends to soften the conflict at the heart of the *Gorgias*.' See Teodoro Katinis, *Sperone Speroni and the Debate over Sophistry in the Italian Renaissance* (Boston: Brill, 2018): 13. James Hankins observes that Bruni describes the dialogue as 'a very pleasant and memorable dispute held between Socrates, Gorgias, Callicles and Polus' and that 'Bruni read a more jocular tone into the bitter quarrels of the dialogue.' Hankins notes that all the 'products of rhetorical culture,' e.g., Cicero, Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, and Bruni, 'were inclined to soften' the radical contrasts that Dodds, for example, found in the *Gorgias*. See his *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Brill, 1994): 55-56.

6 523a ff.

7 So unusual is Socrates' maieutic success that the apparent conversion of Alcibiades in *Alc. 1* is cited by Harold Tarrant as a compelling reason to regard that dialogue as spurious. See Tarrant's *Plato's First Interpreters*, 119. I think Tarrant may be misreading the *Alc. 1* and misunderstanding the reason for the change in Alcibiades' way of answering Socrates from uninterested and noncommittal to seemingly interested and committed.

8 See Alessandra Fussi, 'Why is the *Gorgias* so Bitter?', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2000): 39-58.

9 See 'What Is a Classic?' in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Vol. XXXII. The Harvard Classics (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909-1914).

10 Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 58.

11 Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 36.

12 *Rep.* 434d-441c.

13 Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 61. On Gorgias as representing misguided *nous* rather than *epithumia*, see Tarrant's footnote 37. In *Alc. 1*, Socrates also describes Alcibiades, like Gorgias, as 'wavering' because he repeatedly refuses 'to answer for himself.' There is what I would describe as a Digression on Answering for Oneself in *Alc. 1* at 112d-113c and a Digression on Wavering at 117a-118b.

14 Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 18.

15 Eric Voegelin, in contrast, describes Polus this way: 'He is the type of man who will piously praise the rule of law and condemn the tyrant – and who fervently envies the tyrant and would love nothing better than to be one himself.' On the other hand, Voegelin claims that 'Gorgias has still some sense of decency; he is aware of the existential conflict underlying the intellectual clash, and his conscience worries him.' See 'The Philosophy of Existence: Plato's *Gorgias*,' *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Oct., 1949): 479, 481.

16 The various chronologies of Plato's works place the date of composition of the *Gorgias* earlier than that of the *Republic*, but it isn't impossible that Plato was working on the two dialogues simultaneously. It's commonly acknowledged that Thrasyarchus in Bk. 1 of the *Republic* bears a close resemblance to Callicles.

17 See 462b-d.

18 452d.

19 Dodds, *Plato, Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 1-18.

20 Socrates praises Callicles' frankness at 487a.

21 447d-448a. On this issue, see Eric Voegelin, 'The Philosophy of Existence: Plato's *Gorgias*,' 477. 'Socrates suggests to Chaerephon the first question: Ask him "Who he is?" (447d). This opening move dominates the whole dialogue. The substance of man is in question, not a philosophical "problem" in the modern sense. This is for all times the decisive question, cutting through the network of opinions, of social ideals and of ideologies; it is the question that appeals to the nobility of the soul; and it is the one question which the ignoble intellectual cannot stand. From this initial question unfold the topics of the dialogue: the function of rhetoric, the problem of justice, and the question whether it is better to do injustice or to suffer injustice, and the fate of the unjust soul.'

22 See Robert J. Penella, 'Philostratus' Letter to Julia Domna,' *Hermes*, 107. Bd., HJ. 2 (1979): 161-162.

23 See Tarrant's account of the history of the reading of the *Gorgias* in *Plato's First Interpreters*.

24 See Scott Consigny, *Gorgias, Sophist and Artist* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 203 ff.

25 See Fussi's perspicuous essay, 'The Dramatic Setting of the *Gorgias*,' a paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, Massachusetts, August 10-15, 1998.

26 447b.

27 See his Introduction to *Plato, Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), x.

28 Dodds describes Callicles as a young man who looks forward to a career in politics, a type of person Plato encountered in his early youth. See *Plato, Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 13-14. Nails believes Callicles to be over thirty. Polus' age is difficult to determine. He could be older or younger than Callicles. Nails believes him to be the youngest of Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogue, but she concludes that he 'is not a youth in the dialogue – far from it: Socrates had read Polus' treatise on the art of rhetoric (462b11) already. So the Polus of the dialogue is an adult who still behaves rather childishly. . . .' If he is younger than Callicles, he can't be much younger. On the other hand, Polus is still inhibited, like Gorgias, by conventional morality, as Callicles notes to explain Socrates' success in his argument with Polus (282d), and this suggests that he might be older than more uninhibited Callicles. See Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Hackett, 2002), 75, 252. As the second interlocutor, Polus is in an intermediate position; he seems to be a blend of the unchecked appetite of youth and the refined conventionalism of old age. It could be, then, that interlocutors get younger as the dialogue moves from Gorgias to Polus to Callicles and older as it moves from Callicles to Polus to Gorgias, with Polus in a pivotal position similar to that of *thumos* in relation to *nous*, on the one hand, and *epithumia*, on the other, in the tripartite soul.

29 486d-e.

30 In Olympiodorus' terms, Callicles bequeaths to Polus and Gorgias a mistaken conception of the final cause of constitutional well-being and the orientation towards that misconceived end which determine, in turn, Polus' conception of the form of constitutional well-being and Gorgias' conception of its creative cause.

31 While Olympiodorus' correlations of the discussion with Callicles with the final cause of constitutional well-being and of the discussion with Polus with the formal cause of constitutional well-being seem correct, he doesn't discern that Callicles' corruption is actually the efficient or creative cause of Gorgias' way of life and that Polus' injustice, inherited from Callicles, is its formal cause.

32 As Tarrant's study of the antique reception of the *Gorgias* shows, only very gradually, as the pre-Neoplatonic preoccupation with rhetoric waned and closer attention was paid to the conversations with Polus and Callicles, did it occur to commentators that a life devoted to rhetoric might be just a manifestation and expression of something more fundamental and that the more appropriate reading of the dialogue is a moral one. Eventually, Olympiodorus faulted Thrasyllus for describing the whole on the basis of a part and proposed that the true *skopos* is constitutional well-being (*Commentary*, 57). Still, despite the fact that the view that rhetoric is the *skopos* leaves us to solve the puzzle of Gorgias' fleeting presence in a dialogue that bears his name, a good number of modern commentators adopt this pre-Neoplatonic position. Aristotle had already implied that the *skopos* is moral transformation when, as Chroust tells us, he recounted the story in his lost *Corinthian Dialogue* of the Corinthian farmer who, 'after having become acquainted with the *Gorgias* – not with Gorgias himself, but with the dialogue Plato wrote attacking the sophists – forthwith gave up his farm and his vines, put his soul under the guidance of Plato and made it a seed-bed and a planting ground for Plato's philosophy. This is the man whom Aristotle honors in his *Corinthian Dialogue*.' The story is quoted by Anton-Hermann Chroust from a fragment in *Aristotle: New Light on his Life and on Some of his Lost Works, Volume 1: Some novel interpretations of the man and his life* (Routledge Library Editions, 1973), 26-27.



33 Gorgias and Polus, Socrates says, 'refuse to tell us the truth. . .,' and are 'riddled with inhibitions. In fact, their sense of propriety is so acute that they had the gall to contradict themselves. . . on the most important matter in the world.' (487a-b).

34 See Plato, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 15.

35 Fussi has noted that the dramatic framing of the *Gorgias* is remarkably minimal. This is yet another unusual feature of the *Gorgias*. It has 'no framing scene,' it takes place, as Dodds also observes, 'in no particular year,' and the transition from outside to inside is not recounted and remarkably sudden. Fussi remarks that 'the metaphorical walls between what is outside and what is inside tend to disappear.' She also observes that 'Socrates associates flattering rhetoric with misleading appearance, which the philosopher unmasks, unveils, divests; he discards the surface in the attempt to reach the naked truth.' All this is consistent with the idea that the movement of the dialogue may be, as I am suggesting, *into Gorgias himself*. See Fussi, 'What is the *Gorgias* so Bitter?': 41-47, 53-54. These oddities of the dramatic frame should be taken seriously. As the Plato scholar Stanley Rosen has observed, we should read Plato as we read Shakespeare; every aspect of the dialogues is deliberate (personal communication).

36 'Well, if something causes more harm than anything else, isn't it the worst things in the world? . . . Doesn't it follow that psychological iniquity, injustice, self-indulgence, and so on – is the worst thing in the world?' (477e). Also, ' . . . Psychological badness is the worst kind there is...' (478d).

37 464a.

38 At *Rep.* 382a-d Plato describes the true lie or the lie in the soul, *i.e.*, the ignorance of one who is deceived or uninformed about the highest realities in the highest part of themselves, the soul. Plato may be said to be exposing the lie in Gorgias' soul, his believing wrongly about the most important things in life.

39 523c. See Fussi, 'Why Is the *Gorgias* so Bitter?': 43.

40 See Consigny, *Gorgias, Sophist and Artist*, 167, on Gorgias' purple-robed performances: ' . . . [H]e engages in exaggerated theatricality or "acting", wearing the traditional purple robes of the rhapsodes. . . .' Although Fussi doesn't share my view that Plato, in the *Gorgias*, is peeling off the layers of Gorgias' personality to reveal the corrupt core, she does make the intriguing observation that, under the pressure of Socrates' unexpected questions, 'Gorgias will be experiencing, before the reader's eyes, something comparable to the revolution brought about by the passage from the age of Kronos to the age of Zeus in the myth.' See 'Why is the *Gorgias* so Bitter?': 44. J. A. Stewart observed about Plato's use of myths, 'When the brisk debate is silenced for a while, and Socrates or another great interlocutor opens his mouth in Myth, . . . the movement of the Philosophic Drama is not arrested, but is being sustained, at a crisis, on another plane.' See *The Myths of Plato*, trans. with Introductory and Other Observations. Second Edition, ed. G. R. Levy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960): 7.

41 Robin Waterfield, in his account of why Socrates died, focuses his attention on the accusations against Socrates in the *Apology* and doesn't entertain the possibility that the *Gorgias* may be more pertinent to this issue. See *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

42 481c.

43 504c-505b.

44 491e.

45 See 493d where Socrates says, 'Or will it make no difference at all to what you think even if I tell you story after story with the same moral?' to which Callicles replies, 'Now you're nearer the mark, Socrates.' Also 505c where Callicles says, 'Actually, these arguments of yours don't interest me in the slightest, and I've only been answering your questions for Gorgias' sake.' What is 'for Gorgias' sake'? For the sake of reputation, honor, social success, and maintaining the subterfuge of the corrupted soul.

46 See Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, 75 ff. on speculation about Callicles.

47 *Rep.* 262a. See Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 63, on the meaning of Callicles' name.

48 Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 68.

# Phenomenology of Illness and the Need for a More Comprehensive Approach: Lessons from a Discussion of Plato's *Charmides*

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*Phenomenology informs a number of contemporary attempts to give more weight to the lived experience of patients and overcome the limitations of a one-sidedly biomedical understanding of illness. Susan Bredlau has recently presented a reading of Plato's dialogue Charmides, which portrays Socrates as a pioneer of the phenomenological approach to illness. I use a critical discussion of Bredlau's interpretation of the Charmides to show that the phenomenology of illness also has its shortcomings and needs to be complemented by still other approaches. While Bredlau does make a number of highly apt and relevant suggestions as to how a narrow biomedical approach to illness may be corrected, some (but not all) of which are related to phenomenology, the attribution to Plato's Socrates of a phenomenological approach is mistaken. Characteristically, Socrates shows little interest in the personal experience of a patient. He is more concerned with the patient's lifestyle and conduct and so suggests an alternative or complementary perspective, stressing the importance of education and prevention to health care.*

**Keywords:** *alternatives to biomedicine, mental and bodily health and illness, phenomenology of illness, Plato's Charmides, Plato's notion of health*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology informs a number of contemporary attempts to challenge naturalistic accounts of illness and correct the health practices to which they

have given rise. Proponents of the phenomenology of medicine seek to give more weight to the lived experience of patients and understand illness more in terms of how it affects this experience than in terms of physical dysfunctions (Benner, 1994; Carel, 2016; Aho, 2018). This is an important and welcome contribution to both the philosophy of health and the attempt to improve medical practice, but we should be wary of expecting too much from phenomenology, which also has its limitations. In particular, we should recognize that a sufficiently comprehensive approach to illness must include still other perspectives than both the biomedical *and* the phenomenological. I argue that this is the main lesson to be learned from ancient philosophy of health in the Platonic tradition.

In her insightful article “Illness as a phenomenon of being-in-the-world with others: Plato’s *Charmides*, Kleinman and Merleau-Ponty,” Susan Bredlau, (2018) argues that Plato’s early dialogue *Charmides* challenges common pre-suppositions about the body and illness. In the *Charmides*, Socrates champions the view that healing Charmides’ headache requires understanding and, to a certain extent, healing his soul. This is perhaps the earliest statement of the perennially popular, albeit still more or less “alternative,” view that doctors should see and treat “the whole person.” Since it also implies, as Bredlau (2018) rightly emphasizes, that mental and physical health may be more closely connected than is assumed by conventional biomedicine, it is also tempting to draw a parallel to contemporary phenomenology. For phenomenology is widely believed to have overcome the subject-object dichotomy and corrected the exaggerated objectivism thought to be characteristic of approaches to human affairs based one-sidedly on natural science. Bredlau relates Plato’s *Charmides* to phenomenology by invoking the work of Merleau-Ponty, who is known especially for his phenomenology of the “lived body” (*corps vivant*).

Now I argue, however, that the parallel between Plato’s *Charmides* and phenomenology cannot be maintained. For all its emphasis on the importance of the soul, and of self-knowledge, the philosophy of Plato remains significantly different from the phenomenological approach. Socrates’ position in the *Charmides* has very little to do with that of modern phenomenological approaches to illness. This does not affect the soundness of Bredlau’s practical conclusions. She is probably right that more than physical interventions are often needed to treat even what seem to be rather trivial physical ailments. Her suggestion that illness should be understood in terms of person’s being-in-the-world with others (Bredlau, 2018, 1) is also interesting and well argued, though perhaps more controversial. But by emphasizing, *pace* Bredlau, the difference between the Socratic and the phenomenological approach to illness, I hope to be able to show some of the shortcomings of the latter. Although sensitivity to lived experience is highly important to understanding and treating illness, it is far from sufficient. And the mind has other important roles to play than that of being the—embodied and

intersubjectively engaged—locus of experience. It can, for example, reflect on and attend to the body's needs and weaknesses and influence and control behavior so as to support long-term health. It is the latter role of the mind, so I argue, which Socrates stresses in the *Charmides*. Hence, the Socratic and the phenomenological approach should be seen as complementary, rather than as overlapping or converging, strategies.

## II. THE SOCRATIC APPROACH TO HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Now let us turn to the *Charmides* in order to see which notion of illness, and which approach to the maintenance of health, Socrates advocates. On the face of it, it does indeed seem that Socrates champions what would in modern terminology be called a “subjective” view of illness. He stresses the role of the soul in illness to such an extent that it could almost be taken as evidence that he subscribes to a kind of general “psychosomaticism,” that is, holds that bodily diseases have exclusively mental causes. Socrates quotes with approval the views of a Thracian doctor who once told him that

The soul is the source both of bodily health and bodily disease for the whole man . . . So it is necessary first and foremost to cure the soul if the parts of the head and of the rest of the body are to be healthy . . . (Plato, 2019, 153e)

Similar statements can be found in other Platonic dialogues. In the *Republic*, for example, Socrates speaks of health as an aspect of a perfect condition of the soul, which is much more valuable than any bodily condition (Plato, 2004, 591b).

There are, however, a number of reasons for resisting such an interpretation of Socrates' view. First, it should be borne in mind that the central topic of the *Charmides* is not health or illness but *temperance* or self-control (*sophrosyne*; σωφροσύνη) (in their recent translation [Plato, 2019], Moore and Raymond suggest that it should rather be rendered as “discipline”). It is the central importance of this virtue (the precise nature of which is left open, as the dialogue is of the open-ended, “aporetic” sort typical of Plato's early writings) that Socrates stresses. The “curing of the soul” with which he is initially concerned turns out to mean “inducing temperance.” So it seems, on closer scrutiny, that Socrates is emphasizing the need for *preventive* measures, for locating the deeper causes of illnesses in the habits and lifestyles of patients, and for fostering metacognitive skills and dispositions that can help with changing these habits, and so improve health in the long term. This is already hinted at in the passage following immediately upon the one quoted above:

The soul is cured by means of certain charms, and these charms consist of beautiful words. It is a result of such words that temperance arises in the soul, and when the soul acquires and possesses temperance, it is easy to provide health both for the head and for the rest of the body. (Plato, 2019, 153e)

Note that Socrates here speaks of “providing health.” He does not speak of “curing” in any direct or literal sense; he does not assume that he, or for that sake any other “doctor,” is able to alleviate the physical sufferings of patients on the spot. Nothing indicates that Socrates takes the notions of magic and folk medicine seriously. I take it that the expressions “charms” and “beautiful words” are used by Socrates to denote (nonmagical) communicative devices aimed at fostering a reflective awareness of one’s condition and its possible causes, and an insight into how one should generally conduct one’s life. There is, on the other hand, no indication in the *Charmides* (nor, for that sake, in any other part of Plato’s work) that illnesses could or should be cured by attending to a patient’s *experiential* states. The reflective awareness pertains to ways of acting and living but not to “what it is like” to live in any specific way, nor to how it feels to be ill.

On a phenomenological approach, by contrast, the doctor or caretaker would have to inquire into Charmides’ own experience, to employ empathy and understand how Charmides’ headache appears to him from his uniquely first-person perspective, and what it *means* to him. Socrates, by contrast, shows little interest in how Charmides is doing in terms of painful experience, or in how he understands his situation. He does not adopt what Bredlau rightly assumes could also be an appropriate phenomenological attitude, viz. “turning towards the body understood as an experiencing subject” (2018, 4). Apart from the lack of concern for experiential states more generally, the very idea of the body as a subject seems alien to Platonic thinking, and Socrates does not assume that the mental capacities he would like to nurture are in any sense “embodied.”

Socrates does suggest, though only implicitly, that the source of the problem lies in Charmides’ social life—which Bredlau (2018, 4f) attempts to capture with the phenomenological notion of “being-in-the-world with others” (see also Section III). Yet Socrates is also markedly uninterested in Charmides’ actions and social relationships as considered from a phenomenological standpoint—which would entail a focus on how he enacts his social self, how he understands and is understood by others, and on the specific meaning which his activities and goals have for him. Socrates effectively ignores all this and opts for a completely detached and general assessment of Charmides’ condition, focusing much more on the *type* of the problem than its specific manifestations. It is quite striking, and also characteristic of the Platonic approach, that Socrates mostly talks *about* Charmides, from a distinctively third-person point of view, rather than *with* Charmides himself. As far as there is a real conversation between them, it consists in Socrates reminding Charmides of his family background (Plato, 2019, 157d–158b) and asking for his view of temperance (Plato, 2019, 159a–151a). Characteristically, Socrates does not ask for Charmides’ subjective understanding of temperance as a phenomenon but tries to elicit answers from him that correspond to generally accepted and objectively appropriate notions and ideas. In one

place, Charmides brings up a suggestion, which he appears to have borrowed from one of the other participants in the dialogue. But Socrates and Charmides immediately agree that the personal or intersubjective genesis of a view should be discarded as irrelevant; the only thing that counts is whether it is true or not (Plato, 2019, 161c).

Socrates does see a need for “curing the soul.” Yet the doctoring he envisages consists not in any concern for Charmides’ “concrete subjectivity” but in the application of general insights to his specific case, the concrete details of which are not considered important. Of course, Socrates’ approach is dialogical; but the aim of the dialogue is to arrive at general truths as to the foundations of health and illness, not to gain access to the perspective of another individual. Additionally, the cure that is discovered by means of the dialogue is a universal remedy, not a treatment that is tailor-made to meet Charmides’ individual needs. In short, for all his emphasis on caring for the soul, Socrates’ approach does not appear fundamentally different from that which is usually attributed to practitioners of conventional objectivist biomedicine.<sup>1</sup>

### III. SELF-KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT PHENOMENOLOGY

There are, however, some passages in the *Charmides* that might seem to suggest a closer affinity to phenomenology. Especially the requirement of *self-knowledge* (Plato, 2019, 165c) might be taken as evidence that Socrates is at least implicitly concerned with experiential states. For Socrates thinks it is not sufficient that Charmides builds up a set of more healthy *dispositions*; he must also have some kind of epistemic access to his own condition. If he possesses temperance at all, Socrates argues, then he must be aware of its presence and have at least an implicit knowledge of its nature (Plato, 2019, 159a).

The self-knowledge requirement reflects one of the most fundamental and pervasive Platonic (and Socratic) doctrines, viz., the view that virtue is at bottom knowledge.<sup>2</sup> It is also one of the most controversial Platonic doctrines; many think that it intellectualizes virtue to an unacceptable degree (Copleston, 1993, 109; compare also Aristotle, 1953, 1145b). The question of whether knowledge is sufficient for virtue is irrelevant to our present concerns, because the self-knowledge requirement could be maintained, and may seem plausible, independently of such a general and controversial doctrine. Now the suggestion that virtue is more than a set of dispositions for acting well is not irrelevant. For if the expression “self-knowledge” were to be understood in the way typical of contemporary philosophy, as denoting the special, presumably immediate and privileged, knowledge we have of our own mental states (Gertler, 2011), then we might be able to identify at least some kind of phenomenological dimension in the Socratic/Platonic



approach to illness. For then illness and health would seem to be conditions which, while perhaps not completely transparent, would have to be reflected in the subjective experience of the person in question. It would also, by the way, make the Socratic/Platonic view less intellectualist, because the “knowledge” in question would be of an immediate, prereflective and possibly preconceptual sort, a kind of “knowledge by acquaintance.”

Now this is not how the self-knowledge requirement should be understood. This is best seen by considering how Plato treats self-knowledge in other places. While he does suggest, in the *Meno*, that we have some kind of implicit knowledge (or proto-knowledge), he also lets Socrates insist that true knowledge (*episteme*) must be obtained by a process of inquiry and so is far from immediate (Plato, 1980, 85c–d). As the process of inquiry serves to bring one’s prior, implicit knowledge into consciousness, it is doubtful whether Plato conceives of it as being conscious in its own right, and not just a set of dispositions. Importantly, Plato conceives of the *self* as something that can in reality be quite different from what it appears (Kamtekar, 2017), which is why it makes sense to demand (as does the Delphic maxim famously adopted by Socrates) that one should come to know oneself—it is a task, and not an easy one. Moreover, the method for obtaining self-knowledge does not consist in reflection on one’s current mental states (or their content), but rather of one’s character and dispositions, together with what is objectively good or bad.

Though Plato does occupy a rather unique position in ancient philosophy by insisting on a sharp distinction between body and soul (something which, as already noted, makes it difficult to square his view with contemporary phenomenology in other respects), he still roughly follows the ancient Greek tradition of conceiving of the mental in broadly functionalist terms: The soul is defined by what it does or is disposed to do.<sup>3</sup> Knowing what it is in general, as a type, consists in knowing what its general, essential functions are; knowing what it is in one’s own particular case, that is, knowing oneself, consists in knowing one’s particular inclinations and dispositions. To obtain such knowledge, one has to cross-examine oneself, which means treating oneself more or less as the interlocutor in a Socratic dialogue (Kamtekar, 2017). This is very different from contemporary notions of self-knowledge as immediate and authoritative and also very different from the basic aim of phenomenology, viz., to uncover and describe what is experienced from a first-person point of view.

#### IV. BEING-IN-THE-WORLD, HEALTH, AND THE *CHARMIDES*

Now, it must be said in fairness to Bredlau (2018) that she does not commit herself to—or ascribe to Plato—any strong phenomenological views as to immediate or privileged self-knowledge. In fact, most of her specific



observations are consistent with the view I have ascribed to Plato. She rightly points out how Socrates diagnoses Charmides with a lack of sufficient self-knowledge and draws a distinction between *how he appears to be* (including how he appears to *himself*) and how his condition *actually is*:

In talking with Charmides, then, Socrates has the opportunity to discover whether Charmides has other symptoms, symptoms that, unlike his headaches, Charmides is most likely unaware of and thus unable to tell Socrates about directly . . . Critias' belief in Charmides' temperance only conceals from Charmides what most needs to be revealed to him: that his soul is, in fact, far more unwell than he realizes . . . (Bredlau, 2018, 6)

From this it is clear that neither Bredlau, nor Socrates as she interprets him, is interested in the immediate content of the patient's—*in casu* Charmides'—experiences. Yet it raises the question how phenomenology could enter the picture. It is probably to be explained in part by Bredlau's reliance on Merleau-Ponty, who is less explicit or pronounced about the “subjectivist” or antirealist<sup>4</sup> implications of phenomenology than were his phenomenological predecessors Husserl and Heidegger. In any case, it is noteworthy that she does not herself suggest that we should rely particularly on empathy, which is otherwise typical of phenomenologically inspired approaches to illness. In fact, she does seem to follow Socrates' approach, inasmuch as she focuses mainly on Charmides' ways of conducting his life and interacting with others, and allows herself to assess it from a more detached standpoint.

Bredlau might of course reject my assumption that phenomenology is wedded to notions of immediacy, first-person authority, and subjective experience. She might object that phenomenology is not subjectivist, but rather an attempt to overcome the very subject-object dichotomy. Now I do in fact think that phenomenology, in almost all its dominant versions, including that of Merleau-Ponty, is committed to giving some kind of priority to first-person experience (Klausen, 2004). Arguing conclusively for that view would be way beyond the scope of the present paper, although crucial textual evidence can be found in, for example, Husserl (1983, §31ff) and Merleau-Ponty (1962, xv). It should also be noted that the current wave of phenomenological studies of illness is centered on the idea that we should attend to “pre-reflective, subjective human experience as it is lived prior to its theorization of science” (Carel, 2016, 2). Fortunately, I do not have to make any controversial or even substantial assumptions about the nature of phenomenology. In order to bring out the essential difference between a phenomenological approach and that of Socrates in the *Charmides*, it suffices to note that a phenomenological investigation cannot ignore how things appear to the subject (i.e., person) in question. But this, as I have argued above, is precisely what Socrates does. It is not that he pays particular attention to the experience of Charmides, to its specific meaning and content, for he does not. Neither is he concerned with that as *embodied*; there are no indications

that he is interested in how Charmides' experience is expressed in facial or bodily gestures, patterns of movement or the like, or the affordances of his physical environment. Nor does he inquire into the interpersonal relationships in which Charmides' is involved—at least not how Charmides' perceives and understands these relationships (he merely employs his own prior knowledge of Charmides' background and social role). He circumvents all this and instead relies on his own understanding (albeit an understanding that becomes refined and qualified through the dialogic exchange) to obtain an independent view of the matter.

The notion from phenomenology which Bredlau (2018) uses most centrally is that of *being-in-the-world*. She rightly emphasizes that a person's being-in-the-world implies a way of being-with-others (Bredlau, 2018, 4). Probably the most charitable way of construing her approach is to see it as a kind of *social* or *cultural* phenomenology. In contrast to mainstream phenomenology of health and illness, she does not urge us to get into patients' minds and understand their experiences, but rather to cultivate sensitivity toward the social relationships and cultural practices in which they are embedded, and which are likely to condition their health and the success of possible interventions.

Now a phenomenology of the social as such is surely both possible and of large potential relevance to the study of health and illness. The contemporary narrow focus on the subjective experiences of individuals in phenomenological research deserves to be broadened, because phenomenology has resources to cover further important aspects of human life (and reality in general). Yet it can still be questioned whether the kind of study Socrates practices in the *Charmides*, and which Bredlau recommends more generally, is genuinely phenomenological.

Again, I try to avoid raising more controversial questions about how to understand basic tenets of phenomenology. It is sufficient to notice that “being-with-others,” as the notion is introduced by Heidegger, denotes an aspect of a person's *being*, and not any transpersonal *relationship* between a person and other persons. It denotes the *encountering* of others, especially how they are implicitly present or “implied” (to put in an un-Heideggerian way, “represented”) in our everyday understanding and dealings (Heidegger, 1962, 153ff.; §26). The social factors and relationships that Bredlau emphasizes in her more specific analysis—for example, Charmides' background and social role, ancient Greek drinking habits, the fact that Charmides appears to be drinking for personal pleasure and not as part of religious worship (and that the latter was the social norm at the time)—are surely all highly relevant to understanding the *case* (i.e., Charmides' condition). They could hardly figure in a phenomenological analysis of his being-in-the-world, at least not as they are presented by Bredlau. For her descriptions do not seem to match the assumedly limited understanding and experience of Charmides himself. They are more like the results of sociopsychological, sociological,

or historical investigations. Several of them will likely have been in *Socrates'* mind and informed his diagnosis, but this does not make them part of, or related to, *Charmides'* being-in-the-world.

While I suspect that Bredlau's interests and observations point more in the direction of a decidedly nonphenomenological approach, perhaps a kind of sociocultural theory, it would indeed be possible to apply phenomenology to the contextual factors she would like to highlight. One might describe the phenomenon of social embeddedness not as it appears to any specific person (and so not, e.g., to Charmides), but quite generally; using one's own first-person experience as a basis for imaginative variation and reflection on the possible forms social relationships might take, and their interrelations (this has been done, in different ways, by, e.g., Sartre, Schütz, and more recently Waldenfels [2015]; Szanto and Moran [2015] are, characteristically, more restrictive in that they focus on the social, first-person *attitude*). The outcome of such an investigation could then be applied to a specific case like that of Charmides'; it would allow the researcher, or therapist, to correct or complement the patient's self-understanding while still practicing, or at least using, phenomenology. Now I am afraid that there is not much in the *Charmides* that exemplifies such an approach (though there may be other parts of Plato's works that are more susceptible to such an interpretation, e.g., *Republic* books 3–5, where social structures in general are examined). It is characteristic that the factors highlighted by Bredlau—for example, the social norms of drinking—are nowhere highlighted by Socrates. Again, he takes a much more direct, or top-down, approach to the problem, assuming, without concern for the subtler social or cultural nuances, that the problem must be a lack of temperance (and, consequently, of appropriate self-knowledge).

There are indications that Bredlau is also advocating a more standard phenomenological approach, focusing on the way social structures are reflected in the subjective understanding of individuals, as she does envisage an investigation into Charmides' experiences:

We might discover, for example, that Charmides' experience of wine as to be drunk to excess reflects the experience of a group of people to whom he was recently introduced. His drinking is, in other words, his admiration of these people and his desire for their friendship, and his headaches, then, reflect not only his experience of wine as to be drunk in excess, but also his experience of these people as worthy—rather than unworthy—of his time and as appropriate—rather than inappropriate—for emulating. (2018, 5)

This does sound like social phenomenology and even quite close to the experience-oriented approach championed by mainstream phenomenologists of health and illness. We might indeed, if we could get to examine the experiences of Charmides more closely, perhaps by interviewing him, perhaps also by observing him with an eye to the meaning implicit in his actions

and gestures, discover the influence of certain culturally induced values and norms. Then it could rightly be seen as an analysis (or medical examination) that is directed at Charmides' being-in-the-world (-with-others). But we cannot. We are not Socrates; we do not have access to Charmides' experiences. Again, this otherwise very sensible suggestion is not the path actually taken by Socrates in the *Charmides*. It should be borne in mind that Plato makes very little of the factual circumstances in the dialogue. Even the connection to drinking is never made explicit, though I do agree with Bredlau (and Hyland, 1981) in suspecting Charmides' headache to be a case of hang-over. Hence, rather than to bring out the main thrust of Socrates' approach, Bredlau's (2018) analysis gives us suggestions for how we might develop the phenomenological approach to illness so as to make it more sensitive to social and cultural factors—and, still more implicitly and indirectly, but not less significantly, how we might complement the phenomenological approach with a genuinely sociocultural perspective.

## V. THE LIMITS OF A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ILLNESS

Rather than showing how Plato anticipated the phenomenological approach to illness, I think Bredlau (2018) has shown the importance of other—complementary—alternatives to a narrow biomedical understanding. She has also, implicitly, called attention to the fact that phenomenology, for all its undeniable potential and relevance to health care and the understanding of illness, has its limitations and needs supplementation and maybe even correction.<sup>5</sup>

Doctors should attend to patients' experiences; they should recognize and respond to subjective manifestations of illness (including the way the experience of illness impacts on the patient's experience of her body, social relations, and whole existence). Now they should not merely do so. Not only should they still inquire into the biomedical (i.e., physical) causes of illness, which are usually not accessible to the patient's own experience. They should also, as Bredlau (2018) rightly stresses, attend to the social and cultural environment of the patient, considering both the ways it is reflected in the patient's understanding *and* the further ways in which it might impact on the patient's condition and potential for illness or cure. In the case of Charmides, the latter may lead to useful knowledge about socially induced habits and behaviors of which he is himself unaware and also of the ways in which his social environment may subsequently impede or support the health-improving efforts.

The relevance of Socrates' approach, as described in the *Charmides*, lies in highlighting a still further, but no less important aspect: the doctor should first and foremost consider *preventive* measures, and efficient "doctoring" may consist in educating and motivating people so as to make them more

knowledgeable about what matters to their health, and more disciplined and responsible in the way they conduct their life. This is more important than the literal doctoring that consists in attempting, through medical interventions, to cure an illness when it has already occurred, something in which Socrates does not seem to have much confidence (he seems, in many respects, to share the constructively skeptical attitude toward biomedicine which has recently been dubbed “gentle medicine” [Stegenga, 2018, 185ff.]).

Doctors should not assume from the outset that patients are ignorant of their actual condition or its possible causes and remedies. This is a central point and a main insight of the phenomenological approach. Neither should a doctor assume that the patient always knows best or that her experience holds the key to her cure. Recent trends in the medical humanities, like narrative medicine or the phenomenological approach, tend to one-sidedly emphasize subjective aspects of health and illness and ignore the potential unreliability of patients’ judgments and patients’ first-person reports (which can also be influenced by social norms and expectations [Hardwig, 1997; Solomon, 2015]). In the dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato lets Socrates draw the important distinction between apparent and actual well-being (1987, 464a); implying, again, that experience or testimony of the patient should not always be taken at face value and that a competent diagnostician, who cares for the whole person and sees her in context, may need to look beyond what is transparent to herself.

Admittedly, hardly any proponents of the phenomenology of medicine have claimed that it should replace the biomedical approach or that it should assume priority.<sup>6</sup> It has been presented mainly as a corrective to the biomedical approach. Nor does it entail that the person’s understanding of her body or illness should always be taken at face value.<sup>7</sup> Phenomenology clearly leaves room for, perhaps even supports, a more balanced approach, which enables the almost inevitable tension between the medical authorities’ and the patient’s perspective to be productively negotiated, rather than devolving into dehumanizing and medically ineffective encounters.<sup>8</sup> Nor is phenomenology of medicine alien to preventive measures. Not least because of its (biomedically more controversial) assimilation of illness with subjective well-being, and because of its focus on a person’s being-in-the-world, which might induce stress or anxiety and give rise to substance abuse or otherwise unhealthy lifestyles, it may play an important role in such measures as well. Yet the key word here is “balanced.” The somewhat antagonistic tone in which phenomenology of medicine is often presented may reflect a genuine need for a kind of “affirmative action” on the part of patients—counterbalancing the tendency to ignore their experience by lending it a strong and independent voice. Still, the goal should be a more constructive integration. Now the Socratic reminder that subjective experiences and understandings might be limited and need to be transcended should be taken seriously and added as a further counterbalancing perspective.

Read without the idealizing filter of Bredlau's interpretation, Socrates' approach may appear intolerably paternalistic and unempathic. One may also object to the way in which Socrates considers Charmides merely an instance of a general pattern (as has been typical of much mainstream biomedicine before the recent trends toward more "personalized" medicine). This reflects the important fact that the relationship of care is, in most cases, asymmetric; the carer is assumed to have not only special responsibilities but also special competences and epistemic privileges (*pace* Carel, 2016, who aptly points to the risk of committing epistemic injustices to the patient). It also demonstrates that while one-sided objectivism is surely inappropriate and probably counterproductive, the objective stance cannot be dispensed with completely.

A number of complementary perspectives are called for, some of which are exemplified or hinted at by Plato's Socrates, some of which are supported by different strands of phenomenology—and some of which may be found in mainstream biomedicine (the real challenge may be to properly *integrate* these perspectives, moving beyond the point where they are considered rival and mutually exclusive). Bredlau (2018) has identified several of those and provided suggestions as to how they may be developed. While it should not be read exactly the way Bredlau has suggested, the *Charmides* does contain important lessons for present-day health care. In particular, it urges us to take a wide view at patients and health conditions and to acknowledge that both public and individual health concerns may be met most effectively not by medical treatment, but by fostering the development of general life skills and improving the conditions under which people live.

It might be argued that I have myself been reading too much into the *Charmides*, committing another kind of anachronism. The dialogue is first and foremost a treatise on temperance, it might be said. The expression "general life skills" does not sound particularly Platonic, and Plato apparently cared little about improving living conditions.<sup>9</sup> It is true that there is nothing in the *Charmides*, indeed nothing in the whole work of Plato, which comes close to suggesting a modern public health approach. It is also true that the emphasis in the *Charmides* is on the fundamental virtues of self-discipline and personal responsibility and less on the more superficial life skills. Yet in spite of this, I do think that the implications of the Socratic approach are much as I have suggested, when it is applied to a contemporary context. For while Plato was obviously not keen on "progressive" (e.g., egalitarian) societal reform, he did see the social context, including the general organization of society, as a crucially necessary precondition for fostering and maintaining the personal virtues.<sup>10</sup> As Bredlau rightly notices, the social context is also hinted at, albeit much more briefly, in the *Charmides*.<sup>11</sup>

That Plato also considered practical life skills to be dependent on, and flow more or less naturally from, the fundamental virtue of self-discipline, merely adds a further dimension to the Socratic lesson for contemporary



health care: that preventive measures have to address people's fundamental attitudes, rather than concentrate on more superficial behavioral changes or health-related information.

## NOTES

1 This is not to deny that there are some smaller, but still quite significant differences—notably that the Socratic focus on temperance differs from the typical biomedical focus on end-stage interventions.

2 See, for example, Plato, 1980 (89a).

3 This is one of the ways in which Plato's view of body and soul seems to differ from modern (i.e., Cartesian) dualism. The soul is not distinguished from the body by being more transparent or otherwise epistemically privileged. It is actually similar to the body in that both are characterized in broadly functionalist terms; this might be said to be another way of bridging the gap between mind and body than that of modern phenomenology. A further difference from modern dualism is Plato's subdivision of the soul in three different parts (2004, 439e–440c), which again suggests a less categorical distinction between the mental and the bodily realm.

4 By “antirealist” I mean the view that the world does not exist (or cannot be understood to exist) independently of some kind of conscious experience (Blinded for Peer Review). While the early Husserl remained agnostic as to such metaphysical questions, the antirealist tendency seems quite strong in Husserl (1983)—see, for example, §49. Though it is not quite clear to what extent she adopts the view herself, Carel does read Husserl as an antirealist in this sense (2016, 19f.). This is compatible with Husserl's well-known maxim “back to the things themselves! (*Zu den Sachen selbst*),” since the “things” referred to are *phenomena* and thus very different from the Kantian notion of the “thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*).”

5 See Sholl (2015) for some different, albeit somewhat related observations as to the limitations of a phenomenology of medicine.

6 Carel does, however, insist that illness, understood in narrowly subjectivist terms, is “the most important element of the disease-illness coupling,” when viewed from an everyday perspective (2016, 17). This may seem rather innocuous, perhaps even trivial—after all, only illness is, per definition, immediately *experienced*. Yet it should be borne in mind that concerns for possible physiological dysfunctions or negative dispositions also may matter strongly and sometimes *ought* to matter strongly, to people, even when viewed from an everyday perspective.

7 Indeed, phenomenology as such (of the more nuanced, philosophically informed sort) makes it likely to assume that we are not reflectively aware of, perhaps fundamentally unable to become aware of, important aspects of our embodied existence. This is also recognized by at least some proponents of phenomenology of medicine. However, it has been less recognized among practitioners of phenomenological qualitative research, which is strongly focused on first-person verbal reports (see, e.g., Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

8 As aptly expressed by a reviewer.

9 As pointed out by a reviewer.

10 See, for example, the *Republic* (Plato, 2004, 491e, 497a–499d). In his subsequent correction of the more elitist Adeimantus, Socrates even seems to express some concern for the conditions of the broader population (Plato, 2004, 499e–500a).

11 Though Socrates' referring to Charmides' family background (Plato, 2019, 157d–c) could also be understood as suggesting an inborn disposition toward temperance—which, again, should probably be read metaphorically.

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## Madness and vice in Plato's *Republic*

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ARTICLE



## Madness and vice in Plato's *Republic*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reconsiders some controversial aspects of Plato's characterization of justice as psychic health. It rejects three prevailing interpretations of Plato's 'medicalization of justice', while providing a new reading that exonerates Plato from the charges raised by his critics. I argue that Plato's account articulates an unprecedented theory of mental health in the history of Western philosophy and medicine. This account is put forward as an alternative to the bio-medical model of mental health developed by Hippocratic doctors. Finally, I discuss the practical implications of Plato's account of justice for his ethical and political theory.

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**KEYWORDS** Plato's *Republic*; mental health; madness; virtue, vice

I

In the *Republic* Plato characterizes justice in terms of a healthy psychological state (444d3–e1).<sup>1</sup> The gist of Plato's account is this: in the same way that health can be described as the natural order of bodily parts, so too justice amounts to the natural order among the faculties of the human psyche (444d1–e5). Plato's account of justice as psychic health has been the subject of vigorous debate among scholars in recent times.<sup>2</sup> One central difficulty concerns the implications which Plato's medicalization of justice carry for his ethical and political thought. Three lines of interpretation have dominated the discussion thus far:

**1.1** Plato deliberately conflates medical notions with moral ones in order to underpin his totalitarian political ideals. Once morality is couched in terms of mental health, and vicious individuals are accordingly seen as mentally ill

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<sup>1</sup>Greek texts are from the OCT. References to the *Republic* are to Slings' edition.

<sup>2</sup>See Kenny "Mental Health"; Stalley, "Mental Health and Individual Responsibility"; Cambiano, "Patologia e metafora politica"; Ruttenberg, "Plato's Use of Analogy"; Lidz, "Medicine as Metaphor in Plato"; Vegetti, *Platone: La Repubblica*; Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*; Hobbs, "Plato and Psychic Harmony"; Szaif, "Die aretè des Leibes"; Renaut, "The Analogy Between Vice and Disease".

(of course, the vast majority of people), the virtuous philosopher can claim the same kind of prerogatives that doctors have over their mentally ill patients (Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, 78; 179–180; Szasz, *The Theology of Medicine*, 7–9; Kenny, “Mental Health”, 23–24; Flew, *Crime of Disease?* 18; Hobbs, “Plato and Psychic Harmony”, 115).

**1.2** Plato indeed fails to distinguish the ethical from the strictly clinical domain, as suggested by (1.1), but this is simply a wrong identification (Martin, *From Morality to Mental Health*, 19), or a way of keeping consistency with his other ethical views (Sassi, “Mental Illness”, 420), rather than a calculated political move on his part.

**1.3** Both (1.1) and (1.2) take Plato’s account of justice as mental health too seriously. Plato never endorsed the unnecessarily strong claim that justice understood as a virtuous state of the soul *is* mental health proper but only the more modest ‘metaphor’ that it is something *like* health; they can in principle be compared with each other in *certain* respects (Stalley, “Mental health and individual responsibility”, 111; Ruttenberg, “Plato’s Use of Analogy”, 145; Stemmer, “Der Grundriß der platonischen Ethik”, 560; Lidz, “Medicine as Metaphor in Plato”).

I contend that (1.1)–(1.3) misrepresent, each one on different grounds, Plato’s conception of justice as mental health. Instead, I shall argue for the following reading:

**1.4** Against (1.1) and (1.2), Plato’s account of justice does not emerge from a confusion, whether deliberate or not, between the moral domain and the medical one. And yet, against (1.3), when Plato holds that justice is a psychologically healthy state, he is not speaking metaphorically.

Or, at least, this is what one must accept in order to make sense of Plato’s argument that justice in the soul stands for a healthy psychological state. To avoid confusion, I think it necessary to examine more carefully Plato’s use of medical and moral terminology in the light of historical as well as philosophical considerations (section II). Historically, as we shall see, Plato was the first thinker in Western thought to develop a systematic account of mental health proper. Because such a notion still determines in decisive ways how we think of the human mind, it is worth investigating how this notion was first conceived by its progenitor at the time of its birth: what its underlying assumptions were, how it was initially characterized, and what sort of difficulties it was intended to solve (section III). Historical considerations are however not the main target of the present discussion; instead, they serve mostly philosophical purposes. In particular, they will reveal that Plato, far from confusing medical

notions with moral ones, as suggested by both (1.1) and (1.2), makes a conscious effort to distance himself from the medical conception of mental health theorized by Greek physician before him. In so doing, and *pace* (1.3), Plato puts forward a pioneering model of mental health which rejects the psychophysical reductionism of Greek doctors. At the most general level, I shall argue, the Platonic model trades upon two central principles: firstly, as just noted, mental health carries with it its own aetiology which is thus different from that of physical health; secondly, and relatedly, Plato's characterization of mental health is not privative but positive (section III). This original account of mental health had significant implications for Plato's political theory, although such implications are certainly not the ones that (1.1) ascribes to him (section IV).

## II

I begin with a brief outline of (1.1), followed by some critical remarks about it. In two influential works published in the 1970s, two renowned English philosophers, Anthony Kenny and Antony Flew, separately accused Plato of intentionally substituting moral categories for medical ones by identifying justice with mental health, on the one hand, and vice with mental illness, on the other. All in all, they argued, Plato's ultimate purpose in medicalizing justice in this manner was mostly political: it was meant to justify the implementation of a social hygiene programme designed to eradicate moral vice in the city-state where the virtuous philosopher could set himself up as the true doctor of the human soul (Kenny, "Mental Health", 23–24; Flew, *Crime or Disease?* 16–18). Two corollaries follow from this reading: firstly, to the extent that vicious people suffer from mental disorders, Plato's medicalization of justice sits well with the old Socratic thesis that no one errs willingly. In so doing, however, it turns a blind eye to some fairly common assumptions about the morally good life and the mentally healthy one. For it is often assumed that mental illness is different from moral vice in roughly the same way that prisons differ from hospitals, and punishment from medical treatment. In some respects, moreover, they appear to be incompatible with each other: while moral vice is incriminating, mental illness is usually exonerating. Secondly, and more problematically, conforming to Plato's exceedingly demanding moral standards, everyone – except the philosopher-ruler – should be deemed mentally ill. On the face of it, this reading concludes, everyone should be subject to the control of Plato's intellectual elite (Kenny, "Mental Health", 24; Flew, *Crime or Disease?* 18).

To avoid such unwelcome implications, Kenny in particular calls for a return to the so-called biomedical model of mental health (Deacon, "The biomedical model of mental disorder"). An advantage of this model, Kenny claims, is that mental disorders are cashed out in terms of organic imbalances, the latter

being the object of impartial clinical description rather than biased moral assessment (Kenny, "Mental Health", 26). A similar line of criticism was also made popular in medical circles by Szasz's (in)famous attack on the 'moralizing' approach to mental health in modern psychiatry. Szasz, who traced the roots of 'the myth of mental illness' all the way back to Plato, regarded Plato's moralizing model of mental health not only as scientifically illegitimate but also politically pernicious. In his view, the claim to medical knowledge on matters of vice and virtue was simply concealing Plato's deeper motivations, namely, to put into practice his totalitarian political ideals (Szasz, *The Theology of Medicine*, 7–9).

I do not think that this line of attack against Plato stands up to scrutiny. To be clear, I do not mean to deny that Plato may have been committed to some form of political totalitarianism. Maybe he was. What I am claiming, instead, is that these are hardly the right kind of premises to authorize that conclusion. There are, in particular, both conceptual and exegetical grounds to reject them. But before elaborating on them, a preliminary observation is in order: since Kenny's seminal article has become a common referent for more recent scholars concerned with the question of mental health in antiquity (Martin, *From Morality to Mental Health*, 23–24; Hobbs, "Plato and Psychic Harmony", 123; Seeskin, "Plato and the Origin of Mental Health", 487, 490; Sassi, "Mental Illness", 413; Irwin, "Mental Health as Moral Virtue", 37), and since (1.3) is in fact a response to (1.1), I shall dwell a great deal on the arguments in support of (1.1). However, beyond exegetical issues, perhaps even more significant is that a rebuttal of (1.1) can be used to cast light on some central conceptual distinctions in Plato's ethics that would remain hidden otherwise.

To begin with, this construal proceeds on the plausible, though not entirely unproblematic,<sup>3</sup> assumption that the logical contrast between health and illness is that of contradictories rather than contraries: one finds oneself either in one state or the other but never in neither – the force of 'or' is consequently that of an exclusive disjunction. While that much is also granted by Plato (*Grg.* 495e), (1.1) conveniently neglects the fact that the notion of (mental) illness allows for a relatively wide range of types and *degrees*.<sup>4</sup> Mental insanity, the sort of mental pathology that would presumably

<sup>3</sup>See Nordenfelt ("The concepts of health and illness"). In what follows I shall assume that when health is understood in a privative manner (*viz.*, as the absence of illness), then unhealthy equals illness. This common assumption is useful for the present discussion, although it is not free from difficulties: a body with an injury is certainly not healthy, but nor is it ill in any meaningful sense of the word. For the sake of clarity, some scholars identify 'malady' as the true logical opposite of 'health' (Sadegh-Zadeh, *Analytic Philosophy of Medicine*, 153).

<sup>4</sup>For some illustrative passages in the Hippocratic Corpus where health and illness are conceptualized as continuous, rather than discrete, categories, see *Coac.* V.726, 13–17 L.; *Art.* 56 (V.242–244 L.); *Aph.* 6.2; *Vet. Med.* 10 (l. 590–592 L.). For further discussion of this point, see Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, 333–334; Schiefsky, *Hippocrates on Ancient Medicine*, 233–234.

authorize the invasive medical practices envisaged by supporters of (1.1) to criticize Plato, is undoubtedly one of the most extreme cases of this clinical spectrum. In treating such marginal pathologies as paradigmatic, consequently, (1.1) just assumes that in Plato's eyes (mentally) unhealthy simply amounts to deranged, insane, or mad.

But why should that be? Even if we assume for the sake of argument that Plato is indeed committed to the view that vice is a clinically pathological condition – which, in any case, I do not concede (sections III–IV) – it hardly follows that he takes it to be the sort of mental pathology that would deprive people of their moral rights. Such a familiar distinction was not unknown to Plato's disciples in antiquity. Consider, for example, a famous passage in *Alcibiades* II, probably written by a member of the Academy when Polemon was its scholar (approximately 314–270 BCE, see Neuhausen, *Der Zweite Alcibiades*, 2010, 7), where Socrates points out that madness (“mania”) differs from sheer stupidity (“êlithious te kai embrontêtous”) by the degree of folly (“aphrosynê”) involved: madness, but not stupidity, is aphrosynê taken to the extreme (138d–140d). That this was not an unusual distinction at the time is also confirmed by Xenophon's report that people do not call those men ‘mad’ (“mainomenous”) who commit slight errors but only the ones who are under a great delusion (“megalê paranoia”) and ignore common sense (*Mem.* III 9. 6–7). Granted, in these passages the notion of ‘degree’ applies to the continuous transition from mental sanity (at its worst) to madness, and not to the classification of different forms of mental illness, which is what my argument requires. Intuitively, though, the notion of illness, whether mental or physical, is equally gradual, and so it was thought to be not only by Hippocratic doctors but also by Plato himself.<sup>5</sup> When we turn to Plato's notion of vice as illness in *Rep.* IV bearing these considerations in mind, I see no need to credit Plato with the implications that (1.1) so inauspiciously ascribes to him. While the passage does state that moral vice is an illness (“nosos”, 444e1) of the human psyche, this is a fairly non-committal statement as far as the degree and nature of the pathology in question is concerned<sup>6</sup> – again, on the dubious assumption that we are dealing here with a *clinical* pathological state.

<sup>5</sup>For Hippocratic doctors, see note 4. While this line of thought, to my knowledge, is never *explicitly* developed by Plato, his views on the nature of health and disease clearly commit him to it (*Rep.* 406b, d; *Tim.* 86b; *Pol.* 307d).

<sup>6</sup>The semantic extension of the Greek noun ‘nosos’ is extremely broad, even for doctors. Some scholars opportunely remind us that ‘nosos’ in Greek might convey *any* adverse condition, including non-pathological ones, although in literature the idea of sorrow, distress, and mental disorder is predominant (Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles*, 41). In the case of Greek doctors, they used ‘nosos’ to designate anything which could disturb or cause pain for men (“ho ti gar an lupeêi ton anthrôpon, toûto kaleetai nousos”, *Flat.* I VI.92,6–7L). Compare *Timaeus* 86b: “whatever affection produces one of these state [madness or ignorance] when someone suffers, it must be called ‘disease’ (nosos)”.



Against this backdrop, one wonders why (1.1) attributes to Plato such implications if there is no need to do so. This question takes us to the second shortcoming of (1.1) mentioned earlier, i.e. that it misconstrues several passages of the *Republic* which allude to mental health and doctors for various argumentative purposes. For the sake of brevity, I do not intend to discuss all of these passages but only the ones that may help us rectify a few misconceptions of Plato's account of mental health – most of these passages centre instead on the *epistemic* parallel between philosophers and doctors (see section IV).<sup>7</sup> One such passage is *Rep.* I 331c where Socrates challenges one of the first tentative definitions of justice in the dialogue. The definition is provided by Cephalus who says that justice is “to tell the truth and pay back what one has received from someone else” (331c2–3).

To refute Cephalus' putative definition, Socrates gets him to admit that such a *definiens* of justice allows too much by saying too little: it makes room for actions that Cephalus himself, upon further reflection, would certainly not consider to be just. Thus, for example, returning a weapon to its owner, who happens to be our friend, might be the right thing to do in some, perhaps most, circumstances, but it is definitely not if our friend has gone mad in the meantime and now claims his weapon back (331c6). Facilitating a lethal weapon to someone out of his mind – in this case, moreover, a friend – is not compatible with Cephalus' view of justice (331d1), nor is it compatible with the Platonic view that just acts must be beneficial and not harmful (and not only for the agent, 332a9–10). As a consequence, Cephalus' definition of justice fails on two counts: firstly, it is inconsistent with his own beliefs about justice; secondly, *definiens* and *definiendum* are not semantically coextensive, which is what one would expect from a successful lexical definition.

For present purposes, however, more significant than Cephalus' philosophical limitations is how his interchange with Socrates has been construed by some scholars as making explicit, for the first time in the dialogue, that “madmen have no rights: they may not claim their property, they are not entitled to the truth” (Kenny, “Mental Health”, 24). While this interpretation of the passage may be accepted in its own terms, it becomes problematic as an overall interpretation of Plato's medicalization of justice. To the extent that most people would not qualify as just (*viz.*, mentally healthy) by Plato's admittedly high moral standard, it seems to follow from this passage, together

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<sup>7</sup>Kenny's objection to Plato's account of justice as health relies on a particularly uncharitable construal of two additional passages: 329d and 382c. The first one is *not* Plato's own assimilation of vice to madness, as Kenny suggests, but Cephalus' allusion to Sophocles' view of passions as ‘mad masters’. On the other hand, Kenny's reading of 382c, where guardians' lies to the citizens are understood *in analogy* with doctor's administration of drugs (“pharmaka”) to patients, was dismissed as tendentious by Ruttenberg (“Plato's Use of Analogy”, 151–152). Ruttenberg also offers a persuasive rebuttal of Flew's interpretation of *Rep.* 339b and 444e at 146–150.

with the mistaken assumption that absence of mental health equals madness, that most people have no moral rights either.

Is this a faithful reconstruction of Plato's argument? A proper answer to this question requires a more careful reading of the Greek text. When referring to the hypothetical friend who has gone mad, Socrates specifies that he was "sôphronoûntos" before lending the weapon. Shortly afterwards, however, by the time he demands his weapon back, he suddenly "maneis" (i.e. he goes 'mad', 'insane'). The participle 'sôphronoûntos' at 331c6 has been variously rendered into English as "sane" (Reeve, Waterfield), "being in his right mind" (Shorey), and "of sound mind" (Bloom), which is, I agree, clearly the sense intended in the passage, as evinced by the fact that the participle is contrasted with "maneis" (i.e. 'going mad', 'suffering from mental insanity'). Crucially, however, 'maneis', along with its many cognates, is not the only term which 'sôphroneîn' (and its cognates) may oppose in Ancient Greek. The latter is also often contrasted with 'intemperance' and 'licentiousness' ('akolasia'), that is, a generalized incapacity to master one's appetites and passions (e.g. Antiphon 4.1.6, Thucydides 3.37; Democr. Fr. 210; Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 563; Plato *Grg.* 505b, *Symp.* 196c; Aristotle *NE* 1107b6, etc.).<sup>8</sup> In all such cases, 'sôphroneîn' designates a virtuous state of character which is not the opposite of insanity, as it is at *Rep.* 331c6, but of a specific moral vice. Consequently, the same semantic field which is often invoked by Plato to praise a virtuous moral character is being employed at *Rep.* 331c6 to single out the common psychological state of mentally healthy individuals. One significant implication of these semantic remarks for the argument is this: whereas one sense of 'sôphroneîn' designates a positive excellence of character possessed by very few individuals (if any), the other one points to a rather privative notion of mental health understood as the absence of mental disorder. We shall see that such a distinction is crucial for a proper understanding of Plato's notion of mental health.

The reason behind this remarkable ambiguity is to be found in some peculiarities of Greek language and culture, peculiarities which are not entirely alien to modern English. The Greek vocabulary for mental health and illness was also commonly employed, as in many modern languages, to express or imply moral assessment. The Greeks, moreover, did not draw a clear-cut boundary between the 'moral' and the 'medical' use of certain words, and the distinction itself was often construed as a matter of degree rather than discrete taxonomy. The same kind of behaviour or mental state that was regarded as morally shameless could also be deemed clinically pathological when intensified. Tragic madness and its exacerbation of otherwise

<sup>8</sup>For further discussion of 'sôphroneîn' in antiquity, see North's seminal study *Sophrosyne*. More recently, see Rademaker (*Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-restraint*). For passages in Plato where it is contrasted with lack of self-control over appetites, see *Grg.* 491d, 505b and *Symp.* 216d. Compare also *Phdo.* 68c; *Rep.* 389d; 430e; *Symp.*, 196c; *Phdr.* 196c.

common, though unwelcome, psychological states offers good illustrations of precisely this point.<sup>9</sup> Consider, for example, what is perhaps the most realistic depiction of madness in Greek tragedy: Euripides' *Orestes*. After committing his crime Orestes feels guilty, a fairly common human experience, but his feeling of guilt becomes powerful enough to trigger all sort of disturbing hallucinations (*Or.* 255–259; 262–265). Again, while Orestes is subject to an intense grief (“*lypê malista*”), as most people do when coping with loss, he is also mentally ruined as a direct consequence of it – his grief, we are told, made him mad (395–400). Finally, not only does Orestes become forgetful in the midst of despair, as many would in similar circumstances, but he also suffers from amnesia (215–216). In sum, Orestes' symptoms are just the exacerbation of otherwise normal mental states.

Similar considerations apply to the behavioural or functional aspects of mental disorder in antiquity. A good illustration is provided by Herodotus' report of Cambyses' reckless attitude towards the Ethiopian gods as evidence of his mental insanity (III 38.1). The association between mental insanity and disrespect for laws is formulated in positive terms in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (526–565) where the observation of Justice (“*Dikas*”) and the condemnation of lawless (“*anarcheton*”) conduct are seen as partial indicators of mental health (“*ek d' hygieias phrenôn*”). The same sentiment recurs later in Euripides who describes Pentheus' deranged mental state as being contrary to law (“*gnômai paranomôi*”) (*Ba.* 997–1000), contrasting it with those who, unlike Pentheus, are of sound judgement (“*to sôphroneîn*”) and show respect for the gods (*Ba.* 348–349; 1150). In all these ancient sources, lawless behaviour is viewed as sign of mental disorder, but it is not the violation of custom *per se* that renders this characterization intelligible but the degree and nature of the violation in question.

The Greek vocabulary to conceptualize mental health and madness was of course far richer than the single polarity between ‘*sôphrosyne*’ and ‘*mania*’, each of which has also a broader semantic scope outside that polarity.<sup>10</sup> If I have drawn greater attention to it, this is only because that is the relevant antithesis brought up by Socrates at *Rep.* 331c. In any case, these linguistic remarks are sufficient, I hope, for capturing a familiar distinction between two different uses of ‘*sôphroneîn*’ that is easily overlooked by supporters of (1.1). These two uses of the term pick out different stages of a single continuum with moral overtones at one end and clinical ones at the other: on

<sup>9</sup>For scenes of mental insanity in Greek tragedy: Aeschylus (Io: *Supp.* 538–573; Orestes: *Ch.* 1021–1062); Sophocles (*Ajax*, 1–330); Euripides (Herkules: *HF.* 822–1162. Agave: *Ba.* 977–1302. Pentheus: *Ba.* 918ff, and Orestes: *Or.* 34–35; 211–276; 395–423; *IT.* 281–314). For instances of mental disease in Aristophanes, see *Peace* 66 and *Clouds* 833; 843–846.

<sup>10</sup>Similar considerations apply to “*noûn echein*” (Ar. *Wasps*, 1440), “*eu phroneîn*” (Dem. XV 16, Isocrates, I 19–21), “*phronimos*” (Ar. *Birds* 427–30), and even “*hygiaineîn*” (Ar. *Plut.* 364–366), as designating a sound mental “state”, and to “*paranoia*” (Isocrates, I 43), “*aphrosynê*” (*Alcibiades* II, 138c–d), or even “*astheneia*” (138d), as referring to a pathological (or vicious) condition of the mind.

the one hand, 'sanity' and 'normalcy'; on the other, 'sound judgment' or even 'wisdom'. It is only in opposing the latter use, but not the former, that the literal antonym of 'sôphrosyne' (i.e. 'aphrosynê') could come to express the idea of 'irrationality' in the general sense of sheer 'stupidity' or 'foolishness' as applied to mentally healthy individuals, despite the fact that the same term was also commonly employed by Greek physicians to diagnose mental insanity.<sup>11</sup> And while the specific meaning, be it medical or moral, which such terms may acquire across different linguistic contexts is not always clear, recognizing this ambiguity is a way of vindicating the distinction rather than abandoning it.

Of course, given that being 'sane' may also connote 'virtue' or 'intelligence' understood as the opposite of 'vice' and 'stupidity' (e.g. Aristophanes *Birds* 427–430; Antiphon II. β.5; Demosthenes XV.16), this is obviously not a case of simple accidental polysemy.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, even in those instances where the medical connotations of certain Greek expressions are not immediately at play, they are still lurking somewhat in the background, and they must be allowed to inform Plato's contemporary audience, if only obliquely. This is not to concede that the two uses are indistinguishable from each other, though. To the extent that a virtuous agent must enjoy some degree of mental health in the first place – even this claim requires some qualifications –<sup>13</sup> the medical sense must be entailed by the moral one, although the converse does not hold: mental sanity is still a far cry from the high standard of rationality associated with moral virtue. One consequence of this distinction is that we are not allowed to conflate one category, the medical, with the other, the moral one, in the way that both (1.1) and (1.2) take Plato to do. It is thus far from clear, and indeed very unlikely, that Plato's medical account of justice at the end of *Rep.* IV 444c–e was intended as a retrospective allusion to *Rep.* 331c, so that the just agent envisaged in Book IV could match the (merely) sane one of Book I, while the vicious individual of Book IV could be paired with the madman of Book I. But this is exactly the connection established by (1.1) to underpin its main line of attack against Plato.

On the other hand, (1.3)'s response to (1.1), to the effect that Plato's characterization of justice as mental health should not be taken literally, does not fare any better. On this reading, Plato was never committed to the statement that moral virtue *is* mental health but only to the more modest metaphor that it is *like* health. At best, Plato's parallel is meant to underscore the (not so obvious) motivational force of the just life: justice is like health in that each

<sup>11</sup>Compare *Vict.* 150, 29; 154, 7–11 Joly-Byl. with Jouanna ("The Typology and Aetiology of Madness").

<sup>12</sup>Dover rightly observes that "Greek lacked words which meant 'sane' or 'normal' in the purely clinical sense but did not also denote virtue or intelligence" (*Greek Popular Morality*, 127).

<sup>13</sup>Given the scope of the discussion, I shall not address those passages in Plato where madness (mania) is favourably characterised as a mental state that should be pursued as part of the good life (which, of course, would make my case against (1.1) easier). See, for example, *Symp.* 173d–e; *Phdr.* 241e, 244a, 249e, 253a, 263d 265a (with Vogt, "Plato on Madness").

promotes a different dimension of human wellbeing: psychic and physical, respectively. Representative of this view is Ruttenberg ("Plato's Use of Analogy") for whom Plato's reasoning is but an "analogy" (145), which apparently means as much as 'metaphor' given his warning that the statement 'virtue is health' is not to be taken 'literally' (145, 150). Stalley, for his part, also rejects (1.1) on similar grounds, though his main argument against (1.1) is premised on a different strategy. In order to exonerate Plato from the charge of medical paternalism, Stalley downplays the medical significance of Plato's account of justice as psychic health in *Rep.* IV (444d1–e5), while arguing for a weaker version of the analogy between philosophers and doctors. In relation to the epistemic comparison between philosophers and doctors, Stalley observes that it "plays quite a humble role" in the *Republic* ("Mental health and individual responsibility", 117), adding moreover that Plato's attitude towards Greek medicine was rather disdainful (contra Kenny).<sup>14</sup> As for the medical analogy between justice and health in *Rep.* IV, Stalley points out that it ultimately relies upon unassertive formal or quasi-formal criteria according to which "[j]ustice and health are genuinely *alike* in that they both exemplify the fundamental natural order of the universe" ("Mental Health and Individual Responsibility", 113. Emphasis added). And that's it. He certainly admits, as Kenny does, that the analogy with health is intended to support Plato's take on moral motivation: since "[e]veryone wants to be healthy (...), if justice is health, everyone must really want to be just" (Kenny, "Mental Health", 23). Yet he also argues, against Kenny and Flew, that Plato's reasoning provides no more than a weak and limited comparison between health and justice.

This reading is not compatible with the textual evidence, however. Against the claim that Plato's medical characterization of justice is based upon a weak and loose comparison between two different realms – the moral and the medical one, which happen to share a few structural similarities with one another – it is worth noticing that Socrates explicitly admits that virtue – this time unqualified: simple and plain virtue – is "a certain kind of health", whereas vice is a shameful disease (444d12–e1). To make sense of Socrates' conclusive statement we must assume that there must also be other possible ways to conceive of health (otherwise, why the qualification?). The problem is, though, that no other meaning of 'health' is explicitly stated in the text. In addition, Socrates' assertion seems to be at odds with his earlier observation that "there is no difference" (ouden diapheronta, 444c6–7) between the healthy and the ill ("tôn hygieinôn te kai nosôdôn"), on the one hand, and injustice and justice, on the other. Evidently, if it is true that "virtue [aka

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<sup>14</sup>The same conclusion has recently been restated by Levin in her *Plato's Rivalry with Medicine*. I refute this reading in Torres, "Plato's Medicalisation of Ethics".

‘psychic justice’] is a *certain kind of health*”, then there must surely exist *some* difference between one and the other.

In light of these considerations, it is clear that Socrates is not operating with a weak and formal analogy between justice and health in the passage – even if he may have done so earlier for strictly methodological purposes – but with a stronger logical relationship, namely, that of a genus with its species. That is to say, insofar as ‘health’ can be predicated of both the body and the soul, there is indeed no difference between them (i.e. ‘health’ as a *univocal* genus retains its meaning in each case). However, since body and soul are different entities in Plato’s ontology, each instantiates different kinds of health: psychic and physical, respectively. Further evidence in support of this reading is provided by Socrates’ claim that justice is the “*euexia*” (‘healthy condition’) of the human soul (444e1). Remarkably, in the context of Greek medicine, ‘*euexiê*’ (the Ionic equivalent of the Attic ‘*euexia*’) typically denotes a healthy *bodily* state (i.e. health) (e.g. *Acut.* III.244,5 L.; *Aph.* 2.34 (IV.460,1 L.); *Salubr.* VI.84,5 L.).<sup>15</sup> On the face of it, any plausible response to (1.1) must acknowledge that Socrates is not speaking loosely or metaphorically at this point. But, alas, this is precisely what (1.3) denies. Better would be an interpretation of Socrates’ argument that allows us to explain what (1.3) cannot. In providing such an interpretation, my goal is to refute (1.2) and uphold (1.4).

### III

If justice (aka ‘psychic health’) is a certain kind of *health*, then there must be a *genus proximum* under which both psychic and physical health can be subsumed. At the same time, if justice is a certain *kind* of health, there must be a *differentia specifica* which distinguishes one from the other. The *genus proximum* is demarcated by the following criteria:

**(C1):** Health and justice are according to nature (“*kata physin*”), while injustice and disease are contrary to nature (“*para physin*”) (for health: 444d3, 5; for justice: 444d8; 9).

**(C2):** Health and justice represent different orders among constitutive elements (physical and psychological, respectively). In both cases, this order is described in terms of those elements “dominating (“*kratein*”) and being dominated (*krateisthai*) by one another” (health: 444d4; justice: 444d8).

When it comes to the body, (C1) trades on the fact that the body is not simple but complex; it is composed of physical constituents which are

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<sup>15</sup>This is the meaning of ‘*euexia*’ at *Gorgias* 450a.

continuously interacting with each other. Health is the order that results from the natural interaction among them (= C1). At the formal level, as noted already by Galen (*San. Tu.* 1.4 VI.10–12), this characterization of health was unanimously shared by most Greek physicians – at least from the times of Alcmaeon (Aëtius, 5.30.1 = DK 24B4) – although there was no general consensus on the number and kind of the relevant elements in question: whereas some Hippocratic doctors believed that health amounts to the due balance of bodily humours (*Nat. Hom.* 172,13 J; *Vet. Med.* I.602.9–14 L.), others, under the influence of the Sicilian medical school, argued that bodily health is the due balance of the same basic elements underlying the physical universe as a whole, especially *fire and water* (e.g. *Vict.* I.3 126,5-6; I. 32 148,3-150,10; I.35 150,29-156,19 (Joly-Byl). As regards the human soul, on the other hand, (C2) also relies on the assumption that the soul is not simple but complex. Socrates tentatively suggests that it is made of three faculties (*viz.*, appetite, spirit, and reason 437b–441c)<sup>16</sup> and that psychic health is the natural order or harmony whereby each faculty performs its proper function well (443b1–444a2). For present purposes, there is no need to delve into the details of Plato’s psychological theory. Suffice it to emphasize those specific aspects of it that are required for dismissing (1.1)–(1.3) and vindicating (1.4).

Supporters of (1.3) may predictably complain that (C1) and (C2) do not provide sufficient grounds for dismissing their suggestion that Plato is working in the passage with a weak and formal comparison between psychic justice and health. However, as soon as we take into account Plato’s conceptualization of psychic justice as a *species* of the genus ‘health’, the objection is easily neutralized. For the *genus proximum* to physical and psychic health is not just ‘the fundamental natural order of the universe’, as suggested by (1.3), but ‘health’ (!), which is the fundamental natural order of *living organisms*, i.e. of those beings that have a soul in Plato’s general ontology (*Phdo.* 105d3–4; *Rep.*, 353d; *Tim.*, 30b4–5; *Soph.* 246e5–7). Only a living organism, that is, can be either healthy or ill. This is not a minor qualification: there are all sorts of complex entities in Plato’s ontology that may exemplify the “natural order of the universe” – this is the Platonic doctrine of the so-called *oikeios kosmos* or *oikeia aretē* (*Grg.* 506e2–4; *Rep.* 353b; 608e6 and 609a3–4) – but only a living organism can *also* flourish as a result of its constitutive order (see Torres, “The Analogies of Justice and Health in *Republic IV*”). From this perspective, then, health and psychic justice are much closer to each other than to any alternative form of order: the sort of order that characterizes them in particular is also *good* for the bearer of that order – the same could not be said, for example, of a piano. To put in the terminology of a renowned moral philosopher who deliberately followed Plato on precisely this point, only living organisms can participate in a “*biological* form of

<sup>16</sup>Socrates leaves open whether it may have more than three (443d7–8).



goodness". On this account, living organisms are, moreover, the only kind of beings of which it is meaningful to hold that they 'have a good' in a non-metaphorical way (von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness*, 51, 61).

What about the *differentia specifica* that separates psychic from bodily health? At this point, Plato's main contribution to the history of Western medicine, and not just philosophy, becomes apparent. His central insight is simple and yet ground-breaking: leaving aside Greek mythological approaches to mental health (van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 45–72), we possess no reports prior to Plato of the view, so familiar for us today, that the human soul could enjoy health or else suffer from disease due to causes which are not somatic in origin (*Rep.* 444c9–d1).<sup>17</sup> According to Plato's fresh approach to mental health, sound judgement, suitable emotional reactions, and moderate appetites will originate from a healthy soul, even if our body is affected by some ailment, while ill judgements, emotions, and appetites will be the effect of an unhealthy psychological state – again, regardless of how healthy our bodily condition happens to be.

For all its familiarity for us today, this conception of mental health was simply inconceivable for Greek physicians who typically couched mental disorders in terms of *bodily* imbalances. How exactly the connection between the organic and the psychological was established, and which specific bodily mechanisms were thought to be responsible for psychological states, was however a matter of contention. Some physicians theorized that mental faculties and states were ultimately generated by the circulation of air throughout the body, especially inside the brain. Another group of physicians conjectured that the cause of cognition and emotion, as well as their disruption, was localized in the brain, though no mention of air is made by them in this context. A third branch of Hippocratic doctors suggested that blood flow throughout the body was responsible for human intelligence and foolishness. Finally, and exceptionally, some medical writers assigned the cause of mental life to the heart, the liver, or the diaphragm.<sup>18</sup> In sum, despite various points of

<sup>17</sup>An important predecessor is Democritus' notion of psychic order as 'well-being' ("euestō" but also "euthymia": DK A1, B140, A167). Unlike Plato, however, Democritus still thinks of psychic well-being in terms of the atomic, and hence *physical*, constitution of the soul (but see Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 216–227 for important qualifications). Similar considerations apply to the aetiology of psychic illness that we find in Hippocrates' *On Regimen*. Although the distinction between body and soul is duly acknowledged by the author, the soul is still conceived by him as a material entity made of fire and water (*Vict.* I 35 (150,29–156,19 Joly-Byl) with van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 128).

<sup>18</sup>For the idea that madness ('mainesthai'), together with nocturnal fears and derangements, is produced by an excess of phlegm in the brain that blocks the circulation of air see *Morb. Sacr.* (Chs. 7; 14–15 Grens). The Hippocratic writing *De glandulis* gives voice to the second group of physicians by postulating that the human mind ('noûs') is seriously disturbed as a result of brain damage. The author also adds that an excess of bodily fluids has a negative impact on sound judgement ('gnômê'), generating perceptual hallucinations and delusions as a result (VIII.566,11–568,3 L.). At the broadest level, the author of *De morbis* III retains the same aetiology of *De glandulis*, but he goes further by specifying that the bodily fluids in question correspond to excessive amounts of either bile or phlegm in the brain (Ch. 1–2). The third group of Hippocratic authors is well-represented by *De morbis* I where fluctuations in blood circulation are taken to be the main causes of psychological impairment. Human intelligence is accordingly

contention on specific aetiological considerations, all these medical accounts of mental health evidence that there was a general agreement among Greek doctors that mental health and illness were basically bodily epiphenomena. We should not be surprised, therefore, by the claim of those scholars and medical historians who credit Plato with the invention – or perhaps ‘discovery’, as the naturalist would have it – of the notion of mental health in Western thought (Grube, “Greek Medicine”, 133; Kenny, “Mental Health”, 1; Seeskin, “Plato and the origin of mental”).

This brief survey of Hippocratic views about mental health carries with it some meaningful implications for Plato’s ethical theory. First, and foremost, it teaches us that the Hippocratic model of mental health – the earliest formulation of the so-called bio-medical model in Western medicine – and the Platonic one differ from each other in important respects. From an aetiological perspective, unlike the Hippocratic account, Plato’s model is based on the tenet that psychic health is not only engendered and maintained by the complex dynamics of organic life, as shown most conspicuously by the *Timaeus* (86b–87b), but also, and perhaps more frequently, by the *way of life* each individual leads: thoughts, desires, beliefs, feelings, and impulses may also preserve or else disturb psychic order even if there is nothing wrong with one’s bodily health. This is the central aetiological distinction that underlies Plato’s medicalization of justice in *Rep.* IV, namely, the fact that we are dealing with two separate, though intimately connected, spheres of wellbeing, each containing its own modes of causation: just as physical health is damaged by unhealthy things, says Socrates, so too psychic health is impaired by “injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, and ignorance” (444b7–8 with 609b–c). Consequently, far from conflating the medical domain with the moral one, as suggested by both (1.1) and (1.2), Plato is actually trying to keep them apart.

Of course, this is not to deny that there may be substantial overlap between Plato’s model of psychic health and the Hippocratic one. On both models, psychic health is seen as an expression of the agent’s *sound* judgement working properly, although at different levels and due to different causes, while psychic disease may be characterized, at least in view of its symptomatology, as a manifestation of disturbing mental states; harmful desires, emotions, and beliefs which stand in our way to the good life. Still, a partial overlap of these two notions of mental health does not translate

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reported to be disturbed by a change of temperature in the blood caused by bile (*Morb.* I VI.200,11–18 L.; see also *Flat.* XIV (VI.110,16–18 L.; 26–30 L.). Finally, the account of *phrenitis* that we find in *De morbis* III provides a good illustration of the fourth approach. The author explains that *phrenitis*, a pathological condition which is characterised by the presence of delirium, abnormal mood, and cognitive impairment, is caused by an inflammation of the diaphragm (*Morb.* III VII.128,5–9 L.). That Plato knew about these medical ideas is evidenced by his critical reception of them in the *Phaedo* (96b2–8). For ancient medical theories on the bodily substratum of mental activity, including non-Hippocratic authors, see van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 119–135.

into a simple identity of one with the other. Even if we leave aetiological considerations aside, which alone suffices to see why these must be treated as different spheres in Plato's ethical theory, the fact that Plato's account is developed within a broader conception of the good life provides a *further* criterion to distinguish that account from the medicalized notion.

Indeed, unless mental sanity can guarantee human flourishing (all things being equal), the standard against which the Platonic model of mental health is to be measured is not the *clinical* notion of mere sanity but a substantial *ethical* account of virtue and human flourishing. To put it differently, on Plato's model, psychic health is not to be thought of as a *privative* notion which indicates the mere absence of mental disturbance – as suggested by Hippocratic authors. Instead, it designates an *optimal* psychological condition whereby the human soul realizes its full potential, partly characterized in terms of its rational capacity to grasp what is truly good for the agent across different deliberative contexts. The virtuous agent thrives and lives well – or so Plato claimed – and to this extent he enjoys the highest degree of mental health that a human being could possibly achieve. Modern psychologists, explicitly following Plato in this respect, identify this optimal notion of mental health with that of 'positive health', viz., mental health understood not just as the absence of mental disorders but as the positive presence of psychological strengths or virtues that make the good life possible (Peterson et al., *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 10, 35; 46–50).

This additional feature of Plato's distinctive notion of psychic health reveals that his approach differs from the Hippocratic one not only from an aetiological perspective but also in terms of the respective mental *content* which is taken to be the hallmark of psychic health in each case. That granted, a greater merit of the Platonic approach is that it does not simply turn a blind eye to the Hippocratic one but actually incorporates it as part of a richer account of mental health. On the one hand, it goes beyond the Hippocratic model by suggesting that there is more to psychic health than, say, not being depressed or insane. On the other hand, however, it also remains sensitive to the negative account of Hippocratic doctors since at least some degree of mental health negatively conceived is required to thrive and live well. As a result, the Hippocratic model is nicely subsumed under the Platonic one but not the other way around.

#### IV

Let us now return to Plato's characterization of moral virtue as mental health in *Rep.* IV, so we can make sense of it by looking at the ground covered thus far. When Plato makes Socrates argue that virtue is "a certain kind of health" or the "healthy state of the soul" (*euexia psychês*, 444e1 with n. 15), he is not speaking metaphorically or loosely, as suggested by (1.3) to protect Plato's

account from the attack of (1.1) and (1.2). For virtue *is*, as noted earlier, a healthy state of the human soul. It is 'a certain kind of health' on two grounds: firstly, it is not reducible to somatic causes, hence it is not a bodily epiphenomenon; secondly, it is not a negative characterization but a positive one. To the extent that physicalism and negative health were two main aspects of the *medical* account of mental health in Plato's time, we can also safely conclude, against (1.1) and (1.2), that Plato is not simply conflating medical with moral categories despite his claim that individual justice *is* a healthy state of the soul. On the contrary, he seeks to distinguish one from the other by putting forward a new dimension of health that was largely ignored by Greek physicians (*Charm.* 156d3–157c6).

A potential objection remains, though. Predictably, supporters of (1.1) may complain that even if we concede on Plato's behalf that most people are not clinically mad, this is not to say that no form of therapy may be required to improve their psychological wellbeing. If positive health demands the cultivation of virtues such as moderation, courage, wisdom, and justice, then people would still need some form of therapeutic intervention, *as long as they are not virtuous*. Furthermore, so the objection goes, there is nothing in Plato's notion of mental health that actually excludes the sort of coercive practices that (1.1) ascribes to modern psychiatry.

To meet this objection, two brief but important points should be considered: firstly, the objection does not apply if, for Plato, as I shall argue, the autonomy of the individual plays a central role in his psychological wellbeing; secondly, and relatedly, once mental health, couched in positive terms, is distinguished from bodily health in general, and mere sanity in particular, an *alternative* form of therapy seems to be required as a result. This alternative therapeutic method is not provided by medicine but by the art of dialectic – which again strongly promotes, rather than impede, autonomy in matters of personal wellbeing.

As for the first consideration, Plato's emphasis on autonomy in medical contexts adopts different forms. One such form is his insistence that failing to take care of one's own health in the absence of a third party, which regulates our behaviour externally, is symptomatic of a defective *moral* character. When people neglect themselves by ignoring how to secure their own wellbeing, fail to cultivate a minimum amount of discipline necessary to achieve a healthy life, and do not have some moderation over their immediate impulses and desires, their health, both physical and mental, inevitably deteriorates. What makes them sick, even at the bodily level, is their chosen *way of life* ("diaita", 404d1; 404e–d; see also 407c8–4; 408a4–b1; 410b1–3). From this perspective, even bodily health is an eminently ethical matter for Plato, and in some sense, which is the reversal of the Hippocratic position, an *effect* of psychic health (Renaut, "The Analogy Between Vice and Disease"). Exercise, nourishment, and sexual behaviour, all of them included

by Socrates in *Rep* III in the way of life one chooses to lead (e.g. 403e, 404b–d), are important ingredients in the attainment of physical wellbeing, and complete lack of moral virtue in any of these areas may result in self-inflicted harm.

That is the reason why the overpopulation of doctors in a city–state, but also judges (405a6–b3), is condemned by Plato, as it signals a collective form of moral decadence. To be clear, what is truly shameful (“*aischron*”) about this situation is not the presence of the medical profession *per se* in Plato’s ideal city–state, as suggested by Stalley (“Mental Health and Individual Responsibility”, 115–116) and Levin (*Plato’s Rivalry with Medicine*, 2; 115). After all, *good* doctors are needed in Kallipolis (*Rep.* 408d2–3; 407c8–d4). Instead, what makes this situation shameful are the causes behind the increasing number of doctors in Kallipolis, the main one being people’s incapacity to take care of their wellbeing by themselves. Additionally, this also explains why Plato recommends that *good* doctors restrict themselves to treating patients who are capable of moderation and self-restraint (408b1; see also 407c8–d4 and 409e5–410a1) and who only need medical intervention due to causes which are beyond their control (405c7–d1). Good doctors know perfectly well that patients who are sick as a result of their own intemperance (“*akolaston*”, 408b2) are not likely to benefit from medical treatment (*Rep.* 406d5; 408b2–3; 425a, compare *Charm.* 157a). Plato’s strategy is clear enough: by reflecting upon the significance of individual autonomy for the achievement of physical health, he has Socrates make a broader point about the role of individual agency in the achievement of the good life. The message is straightforward: why should doctors and judges be required to control (‘from without’) the conduct of people who are already well disposed towards virtue (‘from within’)? (*Rep.* 405a6–b3).<sup>19</sup>

Against this background, then, Plato’s dialectician does in fact set himself up as the doctor of the human soul, as rightly observed by (1.1). Nevertheless, since individual autonomy is involved in the attainment and maintenance of one’s health, both physical and mental, he does so with the intention of vindicating citizens’ autonomy rather than diminishing it. But not only this: he also does so by promoting a non-invasive form of psychological therapy based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Indeed, central to Plato’s therapeutic view of philosophy is the conviction that words have the power to alter the subjective phenomenology of the human soul: they can instil either true or false beliefs, welcome or unwelcome emotional states, and beneficial or harmful desires.<sup>20</sup> By proceeding upon that conviction, the dialectician, rather than taking away the right of people who

<sup>19</sup>For the appropriate care of the body as a model for ‘larger questions of autonomy’ in antiquity, see Holmes (*The Symptom and the Subject*, 177–182).

<sup>20</sup>This therapeutic account of speech was not unique to Plato (see Grg. *Hel.* § 13 and Antiphon’s views as reported by Pseud. Plutarch. *Vit. X orat.*, I, 18). For further discussion, see Laín-Entralgo, *La Curación por la Palabra*; Ford, *The Origins of Criticism*, 159–187; Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 192–227.

are not in a healthy state of mind (“ouch hygiainei”) – without being clinically mad – tries to persuade them in a gently manner (“êrema”) of how deceitful and harmful their current beliefs are (*Rep.* 476e). Further information on the nature and scope of this psycho-dialectical intervention can be found in Plato’s celebrated Allegory of the Cave in Book VII, where Socrates observes that the prisoner is not only released from his alienated condition but actually *cured* (“iasin”) of his foolishness (“aphrosynês”) (515c4). His cure, Socrates continues, is made possible by a constructive dialogue where the prisoner is encouraged to answer questions of the form ‘what is F?’ (515d6) by someone else. Because he is unable to provide a right answer to such deceptively simple questions, his failure gives rise to a state of perplexity (“aporeîn”) leading him to embark on a long dialectical ascent that will eventually reveal why his past life was but a great delusion – the reference in the passage to the Socratic *elenchus* as a therapeutic procedure is evident (*Charm.* 155e–157a; *Prot.*, 313e2; *Grg.* 475d5; *Phdo.* 89a5; *Theaet.* 148e–151; *Soph.* 226d–230e).

The prospect of a constructive dialogue between doctor and patient anticipates a remarkable passage in the *Laws* (720a–e), Plato’s last work, where the Athenian Stranger distinguishes between two groups of doctors to illustrate how virtuous legislators proceed. To this end, the Stranger distinguishes between doctors who treat free citizens and those who deal with slaves – the latter being slaves themselves. These two classes of physicians are distinguished not only by their respective political status but also in virtue of their respective therapeutic method (“tropon”, 720a4). More precisely, the slave physician acquires his healing techniques by simply observing how free doctors treat their (free) patients, so he can mechanically imitate their procedures. This being the only source of their medical practice, they are incapable of giving an account (“logon ... didôsin”, 720c3–5) of their medical procedures, possessing bare “experience” (“empeiria”) instead. Because slave doctors cannot give an account of their actions, their practice resembles that of a stubborn tyrant (“tyrannos authadôs”, 720c7) who refuses to take into consideration the patient’s voice in his own medical treatment. Free doctors, by contrast, investigate the nature (“physis”) and origin of the patient’s disease (720b4; d3) by engaging in a dialogue with him. This allows doctors to transfer their medical knowledge to the patient, which is crucial for the cultivation of autonomy in matters of personal wellbeing, but also to learn from the sick and his biography.<sup>21</sup> Above all, free doctors never issue a medical prescription without first gaining the patient’s consent on what is to be done (720d7–8; compare *Rep.* 476e).

<sup>21</sup>On the question of Hippocrates and the education of the audience and patients, see Horstmannshoff, *Hippocrates and Medical Education*. The *locus classicus* is *Aff.* I.VI,208 L., but similar remarks can be found in *Vict.* IV 87, VI.642 L.; *De Arte* 11, VI.20L. The same motif is traceable in Xenophon’s Socrates (*Mem.* 4.8.9).

The Stranger's medical parallel is meant to mirror a political antagonism between two forms of legislation: one factual, which is compared to tyranny, the other normative. Whereas slave doctors behave just as "all existing legislation does" (857c6), free doctors incarnate Plato's own ideal of legislation where the emphasis is placed on the intellectual and moral development of citizens. If in the *Republic* the comparison between doctors and rulers is employed by Plato to justify his radical claim that judges and "other legal professions" (405a2) are superfluous when citizens are truly virtuous, and indeed *free*,<sup>22</sup> in the *Laws* the practice of 'free doctors' – presumably another label for the 'good doctors' of *Republic* III – provides Plato with a normative framework to conceptualize his own legislative project. In a nutshell, a good legislator is like a free doctor in that he also educates citizens, promotes the full development of their agency, and learns from what they have to say on matters of legislation, including legislation about their own wellbeing.

Ultimately, then, we certainly cannot conclude, on the basis of these considerations alone, that Plato did not endorse some form of political totalitarianism. For all that we know, maybe he did. But I hope to have shown that his original approach to mental health does not offer the required evidence to guarantee that conclusion. It actually opposes it.

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<sup>22</sup>For the relation of doctors with free citizens in the *Republic*, see 405a. This is a provocative inversion of Greek traditional beliefs about tyranny according to which the absence of laws is characteristic of tyrannical governments (Thucydides, III 62, 3; Euripides *Supp.* 429–434). This is not to say that laws are altogether unnecessary (Annas, *Virtue and Law in Plato*, 9–31). For the implications that Plato's medical conception of justice carry for his view of tyranny in the *Republic*, see Brill, "Political Pathology".



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# Obedience and Disobedience in Plato's *Crito* and the *Apology*: Anticipating the Democratic Turn of Civil Disobedience

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## Abstract

Faced with a choice between escaping without consequences and submitting to a democratic decision, Socrates chooses the latter. So immense is Socrates' duty to obey law, we are led to believe, that even the threat of death is insufficient to abrogate it. *Crito* proposes several arguments purporting to ground Socrates' strong duty to obey, with the appeal to the Athenian system's democratic credentials carrying most of the normative weight. A careful reading of the dialogue, in conjunction with the '*Apology*', reveals, however, a more complex picture. If *Crito* sets the conditions that render a regime legitimate, and therefore warranting of obedience, the *Apology* reveals a legal system's shortcomings that justify disobedience. This article substantiates this position by delineating circumstances that can justify resistance. Contemporary forms of political resistance can also rely on similar conditions. Plato's texts anticipate the current democratic turn of civil disobedience.

**Keywords** Crito · Apology · Duty to obey · Democratic legitimacy · Persuade or obey · Civil disobedience

## 1 Introduction

Unjustly charged with corrupting Athenian youth, introducing new deities, and rejecting Athens's ancestral gods, Socrates is convicted by a jury of his peers and sentenced to death (*Apology* 24b).<sup>1</sup> His disciple, Crito, visits him in jail. Plato's *Crito* portrays his last-ditch effort to persuade Socrates to escape execution. The dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Platonic texts are to John Cooper's edition (Cooper 1997). There is considerable ambiguity whether the Platonic Socrates is an accurate depiction of the real Socrates. I shall not discuss this matter. Following broad academic consensus, I simply assume that, at least in early dialogues such as *Crito*, we get a fairly accurate portrayal of Socrates. See Vlastos (1991: 45–48). Cf. Kahn (1996).

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begins with the eponymous character lamenting the consequences Socrates' death will have for those closest to him. His friends may face scorn from Athenians for failing to assist a friend wrongly sentenced to die. Socrates' choice to accept death would therefore tarnish their reputation (*Crito* 44c). In refusing to leave, Socrates also betrays his parental duties. His family will suffer because of his death (*Crito* 45d). Crito next assuages Socrates' possible fears about his escape. Informers can be bought off easily thus ensuring a successful escape (*Crito* 44e), while several places, like Thessaly, will welcome Socrates and let him spend the rest of his days freely, presumably philosophising (*Crito* 45c. Cf. *Crito* 53b, *Apology* 37c, 38a). Crito also criticises 'the handling of the trial itself' (*Crito* 45e), alluding to an improper procedure. But no evidence indicates any procedural impropriety. Indeed, as I suggest later, the procedure's formal legitimacy remains largely unchallenged. Socrates must obey, we shall see, precisely because the appropriate democratic procedures were observed.

Socrates swiftly shrugs off Crito's claims (*Crito* 48c). They are largely personal appeals, failing to invoke a principled (as opposed to self-interested) reason why Socrates' escape is warranted. Academic scholarship often dismisses Crito as either unwilling to seriously challenge Socratic arguments or incapable of doing so (see e.g., Dagger and Lefkowitz 2014; Young 1974). And although his unpersuasive appeals to personal detriment, money, and family justify the characterisation we must not simply disregard his claims. Trivial as they may seem, Crito's arguments remain relevant. In assuring an unobstructed escape, Crito removes self-interested reasons for obedience. Socrates, Crito guarantees, can breach the law with impunity; bribery of prison guards, for example, ensures he can escape without consequences (e.g., *Crito* 46a. Also Gowder 2015). In response, Socrates discusses several arguments that explain why impunity is irrelevant to the possibility of disobedience. The philosopher is interested in principled reasons for his action (*Crito* 46b). He therefore proposes and defends claims that plausibly ground a general duty to obey.<sup>2</sup> So strong and multi-faceted are the arguments for obedience that the dialogue has been traditionally considered the archetypical treatise on absolute obedience to law with Socrates emerging as the quintessential apologist of democratic authority (See e.g., Taylor 1927: 168; Zinn 1991: 909–910; Delmas 2017: 195–196).

This article aims to subvert that interpretation. I begin by surveying Socrates' arguments for obedience, in Sect. 2. Considerations such as the destructive effect of disobedience on the legal system or Socrates' agreement with the polis clearly support Socrates' belief that he is bound by the jury's decision. But in the end, it is democratic citizenship, which I investigate in Sect. 3, that emerges as the primary ground upon which a claim for general obedience is plausible. Socrates is embedded in a democratic system the sheer existence of which warrants, *prima facie*, Socrates' obedience, irrespective of the specific justice of

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary discussions on political obligation insist that such duty is general, moral, content-independent, and *prima facie*. See e.g., Simmons 1979; Smith 1973. The duty exists in addition to any moral duties to obey created by virtue of a law's substantive moral value. All references to a duty to obey law, unless otherwise stated, will be to this general, content-independent commitment.

this or that pronouncement. Athenians, including Socrates, incur a strong duty to obey to the extent that the legal system remains democratic. My analysis portrays democratic citizenship and civic engagement as the legitimating criteria of a legal system.

With these criteria in mind, we can proceed to investigate the possibilities of disobedience, a task I undertake in Sect. 4. When read together, *Crito* and the *Apology*, reveal a complex picture of citizens' appropriate attitude to law, shedding light on limits to obedience. I shall argue that classical liberal interpretations of civil disobedience (e.g., Rawls 1999) cannot fully accommodate all the circumstances of justified disobedience found in Plato's texts. But such examples can be more easily reconciled with democratic theories of civil disobedience. Theorists from Arendt (1972) to Habermas (1985) and more recently to Markovits (2005) have contended that disobedience can take place even within broadly democratic regimes for procedural rather than purely substantive reasons. Plato's discussion on circumstances of morally permissible disobedience, I shall argue, anticipates that approach.

## 2 Grounds of Obedience

To counter Crito's appeals, Socrates envisions the personified Laws of Athens (*nomoi kai to koinon tis poleos*) confronting him and challenging his possible decision to leave.<sup>3</sup> It should be borne in mind, however, that in that imagined encounter Socrates serves as a proxy for every Athenian citizen. The Laws' speech mostly consists of arguments couched in general terms with only occasional references to Socrates' own distinctive (and atypical) position within the Athenian system (see *Crito* 52a-b, on claims directly aimed at Socrates' particular position). That is no accident. Again, what is at stake here are principled reasons for (or against) obedience (*Crito* 46b, 48c-d). Far from a targeted claim at Socrates' obedience, the Laws' purport to explain why all democratic citizens confronted with an unjust political outcome have a *prima facie* duty to abide by it. The abstract scope of the speech also enables us to extrapolate from it criteria for legitimacy, which can then be used to explain citizens' commitments to law.

The Laws' exhortation for obedience begins with a basic concern about disobedience:

Do you not by this action you are attempting intend to destroy us, the laws, and indeed the whole city, as far as you are concerned? Or do you think it possible for a city not to be destroyed if the verdicts of its courts have no force but are nullified and set at naught by private individuals? (*Crito* 50b)

<sup>3</sup> See Wozzley (1979) on the Laws' speech as reflective of Socratic views. Cf. Young (1974), on the claim that the Laws discuss claims not necessarily adopted by Socrates himself but arguments that can successfully persuade Crito and others with his limited intellectual capacity. See also Weiss (1997), Rosano (2000).

Socrates must submit to the jury's decision, lest he endanger the entire legal system.<sup>4</sup> But is it possible for an isolated act of disobedience to destroy a legal system? Some individual disobedience may indeed prove exceptionally damaging, notably where overall security is jeopardised (e.g., Alcibiades' disobedience during the Peloponnesian War) (Kirkpatrick 2015: 364; Finnis 2011: 361). It generally seems difficult, however, for solitary law-breaking to bring down a legal structure—even a small society such as a Greek polis.

For Plato, however, disobedience menaces the legal system insofar as it reveals a general attitude of disrespect to law's authority. Those who destroy laws 'corrupt the youth and the ignorant', flouting the system's authority and setting bad examples, thus inciting further lawbreaking (*Crito* 53c).<sup>5</sup> Such adverse consequences render obedience urgent. A legal system loses effectiveness if citizens deem their duty to obey weak and easily offset; citizens' respect for law erodes, breeding unlawfulness. The Laws' denunciation of disobedience stands as a warning. When citizens fail to perceive decisions taken following otherwise legitimate procedures as creating strong duties of obedience, law becomes undermined. A similar warning pertains to contemporary societies: if disobedience signifies a reduced sense of law-abidingness, the legal system's authority and stability is threatened.<sup>6</sup>

The 'destructive effect' thesis is seemingly particularly persuasive for Athens, where citizens' relationship with law is intimate. *Nomos* includes not only formally enacted law, but also customs and traditions, assuming a greater degree of social cohesion (Heinze 2016: 117; 2018: 121).<sup>7</sup> Disobedience corrupts *nomos* at the expense of communal spirit, eroding bonds that hold citizens together.<sup>8</sup> The entire

<sup>4</sup> See Kraut (1984: 48–50), on the argument for destruction read together with the filial gratitude and benefits argument.

<sup>5</sup> See, in a similar spirit, Aristotle's concern that 'illegality creeps in unnoticed' and destroys the constitution, warranting thus robust response to even small violations, *Politics*, 5.8.1307b32–33. References to Aristotle's *Politics* are to C.D.C. Reeves's edition (Aristotle 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See also Hart (1982: 160–161), on how some moral commitment to the legal system is necessary for its stability (though this is only a contingent truth about the connection between law and morality). See also Douzinas (2013: 64–65), on lawbreaking as an indication of national corruption.

<sup>7</sup> By contrast, decrees (*psephismata*) refer to ad hoc legal enactments rather than general pronouncements, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.10. 1137b13–35. References to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are to Terence Irwin's edition (Aristotle 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Citizenship in Athens was restricted to only a fraction of the total population. The vast majority of residents in Athens was excluded from formal citizenship and thus deprived the opportunity of self-government. Women, though citizens, were denied several political rights (e.g., speaking in public, participating in law-making). Slaves and non-Athenians were not citizens at all; although non-Athenians residing in Athens (metics) for long could accumulate significant wealth and thus exert some socio-political power (See e.g., Cephalus in *Republic* 1). Decision-making procedures were only open for citizen-born male heads of households. In this sense, Athenian democracy resembles an oligarchy: the few male citizens exercise political power, often at the expense of other non-citizens (see Heinze 2018: 119). Such restrictive citizenship criteria threaten to render any discussion of ancient democracies outdated. This need not be the case. Several modern scholars, including women, have generally considered classical citizenship criteria (chiefly inspired by Aristotle) adaptable for contemporary, often politically progressive, applications (Arendt 1998; Marcia 2002; Nussbaum 1990). Throughout this article, in discussing classical models of citizenship, I focus on citizenship's content rather than its boundaries. The question of what it means to be a citizen is more pertinent for my purposes than questions of who gets to be a citizen (incidentally, the latter question remains within the regulatory jurisdiction of modern states).

normative structure of a polis is threatened through citizen disrespect. Such bonds are arguably lacking in contemporary societies, which embody a lower degree of social cohesion. Yet the general point remains. Every legal system can claim reasons to be alarmed by citizens' propensity to lawbreaking.

At any rate, consequential arguments can hardly offer conclusive reasons either for or against disobedience. Although societies ought to be concerned with legal violations, it is implausible to maintain that even innocuous, harmless lawbreaking undermines a legal order (see e.g., Raz 1979: 238–241. Cf. Finnis 2011: 361). And if not all disobedience is equally corrosive to the legal system, then a general duty to obey cannot be based solely on the 'destructive effect' thesis. Although that thesis buttresses Socrates' belief that breaking the law is unjust, it cannot establish, on its own, principled reasons against disobedience.

The personified Laws then refer to citizens' agreement to obey their polis's laws. They remind Socrates of his commitment: 'the agreement between us, Socrates,... [was] to respect the judgments ... [of] the city' (*Crito* 50c).<sup>9</sup> Portraying tacit consent to a fundamental pact as creating an obligation to obey, the Laws stake a strong claim to citizens' obedience. Assuming it is morally right to honour one's agreement, citizens are bound to obey democratic laws. A just agreement must be fulfilled. 'When one has come to an agreement that is just with someone', Socrates asks Crito, 'should one fulfil it or cheat on it?' (*Crito* 49e) The proviso of justice raises further questions (See e.g., Kraut 1984: 29–32).<sup>10</sup> Does Socrates mean that the agreement is binding only if its content is just? Or is it a question of the justice of the conditions under which agreement was reached, that is without duress or compulsion? The latter is more plausible considering later emphasis on the agreement's circumstances. Socrates, the Laws explain, agreed 'without compulsion or deceit' (*Crito* 52d–e). As long as the agreement is procedurally fair, citizens incur an obligation to obey its provisions. An otherwise legitimate contract cannot be breached ordinarily simply on grounds of detriment.<sup>11</sup> By analogy, Socrates cannot breach his pact with the state simply because he is convicted; the procedures are legitimate and the agreement ought to be upheld.

Athenian citizens, including Socrates, must discharge their contractual obligation to obey even if they are, on occasion, at a disadvantage. They have enjoyed numerous benefits from the polis because of their agreement:

Did we not, first, bring you to birth, and was it not through us that your father married your mother and beget you?....Or [do you find anything to criticise] in those of us concerned with the nurture of babies and the education that you too received? Were those assigned to that subject not right to instruct your father to educate you in the arts and in physical culture? (*Crito* 50d–e)

<sup>9</sup> For attempts to establish political obligations on consent see Locke (1980: 180); Plamenatz (1968). Cf. Pitkin (1965). Virtually all varieties of consent are subject to severe criticism, e.g. Smith (1973: 960–964); Simmons (1979).

<sup>10</sup> Rawls's account of political obligations grounded on fair play also includes a proviso for justice (Rawls 1964: 9). For Rawls, principles of fairness only operate when the relevant joint enterprise is fundamentally just. But see Simmons 1979: 109–114.

<sup>11</sup> But see unconscionable contracts.



The conferred benefits, such as education, presuppose a tacit, reciprocal agreement. Citizens receive them so long as they obey (on law's facilitative and educative function see e.g., *Apology* 24e, *Politics*, 1266b30, 1287a15-30, 1310a12-23, 7.17. See also Hart 2012: 26–49). Having enjoyed these benefits, they must, in fairness, submit to law. Principles of fairness are often used to ground citizens' duties of obedience. Within cooperative enterprises that administer benefits, participants who enjoy benefits as a result of other members' obedience owe it to them to obey the rules of the system (Hart 1955: 185; Rawls 1964: 9–10.<sup>12</sup> For criticism see (Simmons 1979: 131–132, 139; Smith 1973: 955–959). Should Socrates disobey, he would be acting unfairly towards his fellow citizens who support the regime through obeying its laws. Only such cooperation makes it possible for Athenians to enjoy the scheme's benefits. Even if Socrates' disobedience would not directly (or at all) impact other citizens' receipt of those benefits, it would remain unfair for him to breach the rules of the cooperative enterprise.<sup>13</sup>

The polis, as the benefit-provider, assumes a parental position that seemingly admits no recalcitrance (*Crito* 50e-51a). Some theorists, inspired by this analogy between the state and one's parents, defend a commitment to law grounded on filial gratitude (see e.g., Walker 1989: 364). But the Laws move beyond the limits of gratitude, stressing the entrenched power inequality between the polis as a decision-maker and its citizens as decision-receivers. Just as citizens are 'not on an equal footing with [their] father as regards the right', they are also subjects to law's authority (*Crito* 51a). In fact, the polis ought to be more honoured, more revered, and more respected than one's parents or ancestors (*Crito* 51a). Citizens have no choice but to obey. Even if the state attacks its own citizens, or 'undertake[s] to destroy [them]', retaliation and resistance remain unfathomable (*Crito* 51a). Interestingly, those faced with the polis's overbearing authority resemble slaves forced to live under the rule of a master.<sup>14</sup> Like slaves enduring whatever their masters' command, citizens must always submit to the city's pronouncements.

It is only with the first reference to democratic citizenship and the opportunities citizens enjoy of persuading others about prospective laws that this dogmatic position is softened (*Crito* 51b-c). Far from depriving citizens' freedom, the legal system actually facilitates numerous choices for Athenians. Every fully-fledged citizen has the 'opportunity, once arrived at voting age and having observed the affairs of the city and us the laws....[to] take his possessions and go wherever he pleases' (*Crito* 51c-e). Vaunting the freedom afforded to citizens wishing to emigrate, the Laws depict participation in Athenian affairs as a matter of free choice. To be sure, it is contentious whether the choice to leave one's state is ever, or indeed was for Athenians, tenable, given the extraordinary costs associated with severing deep family ties and friendships normally attached to the exit option (See e.g., Kirkpatrick 2015. Also Hume 1994: 193; Simmons 1979, Ch. 3–4; Dworkin 1998: 1992).

<sup>12</sup> In his *Theory of Justice*, Rawls sees the principle of fairness as playing an ancillary role, with the principle of natural duties being the primary ground of political obligation (Rawls 1999: 310).

<sup>13</sup> As I argue in Sect. 3, the strongest statement of the fairness argument takes into consideration the democratic character of the political enterprise.

<sup>14</sup> '[You were not on an equal footing] with your master, if you had one' (*Crito* 50e, emphasis added).

But that passage also highlights Socrates' notable unwillingness to leave Athens. Not only did he never venture away from Athens, except to undertake military service, but he also refused to request the exile penalty during his trial (*Crito* 52c–53a. *Apology*, 37e; *Crito* 51c–e). Far from grudgingly obeying the law, Socrates decisively and emphatically enjoyed living under Athens's democratic institutions (*Crito* 52b–c). Socrates' commitment to law, even in the face of the jury's flawed decision, chiefly stems from his loyalty to democracy. Democratic citizenship endows Athenians with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and shape political outcomes. Such opportunities legitimise the Athenian system and generate in Socrates (and other Athenians) general duties of obedience.

### 3 Democratic Citizenship

#### 3.1 'Persuade or Obey'

The preceding considerations, such as the citizens' agreement with the polis, are by no means inconsequential to Socrates' decision to abide by the jury's decision. But they cannot provide, on their own, firm grounds for establishing a general duty for obedience. It is rather the democratic character of the Athenian legal system that establishes Socrates' obedience. Democratic citizenship, the Laws remark, is associated with the citizens' opportunity to 'either persuade [the polis] or obey its orders, and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure' (*Crito* 51b). Obedience is expected, and indeed justified, because (or to the extent that) citizens have been allowed opportunities to persuade their fellow citizens 'as to the nature of justice' and therefore the appropriate content of laws (*Crito* 51c).

The formula 'persuade or obey' appears multiple times in the Laws' speech and emerges as the salient condition upon which a claim to general obedience is grounded (first at *Crito* 51b and then again at 51c, and 52a). Persuasion in this context is a communicative, deeply political activity. Although it may initially seem a private attempt to change another person's mind, it is emphatically a mode of public address. Socrates has agreed to 'be a citizen under us' (*Crito* 52c), the Laws exclaim. And being a citizen is nothing but to engage in political activity (*politeuesthai*) (*Crito* 52c). Persuasion presupposes opportunities to participate in politics. Engaging fellow citizens in an effort to persuade them becomes the hallmark of democratic citizenship. This is a richer interpretation of democratic citizenship beyond commonplace understandings of citizenship in terms of sheer legal status (Heinze 2016: 108).

Open access to political processes, I argue, legitimises Athenian democracy. The Athenian system empowers citizens to persuade others, both in legislative and judicial procedures. As long as it secures ample opportunities for civic engagement, Athens remains a legitimate regime capable of staking a claim to its citizens' general obedience even when it produces substantively flawed outcomes. Absent opportunities for persuasion, the formula is inapplicable. In that case, there is no justification for claiming citizens' general obedience. If a citizen's

duty to obey depends on the opportunities for civic engagement available, it follows that should such opportunities diminish, the duty weakens.

Within a regime facilitating citizen engagement, dismissing democratic laws would be unfair. The fairness argument outlined earlier<sup>15</sup> reinforces the claim from democratic citizenship considered here. Within a democratic cooperative enterprise, such as the Athenian democracy, distribution of benefits (and burdens) is ultimately regulated not by a central authority, but by collective decision-making.<sup>16</sup> The democratic system's legal processes, and the decisions it reaches, are shaped by citizens. Socrates owes his obedience to his fellow citizens who play by the rules of the game, submitting themselves to the authority of collectively decided laws.<sup>17</sup> Athenian citizens, as participants to the democratic enterprise, would be violating their duties in fairness if they refused to obey collectively decided laws because they judged them to be somewhat unjust.

Precisely because it secures inclusive and meaningful democratic processes, Athens, the Laws are quick to assure us, never 'issues savage commands' (*Crito* 52a). Far from impositions, laws are the product of processes citizens control; the laws embody, then, the collective will of Athenians (see e.g., Ober 2002: 187). Even when a process's outcome is antithetical to one's interests or convictions, obedience is warranted. Citizen engagement with politics legitimises the savage; what would otherwise be a crude command, the instrument of sheer political power, becomes law, worthy of obedience and respect (see Heinze 2018: 123). Athenian citizens, therefore, incur strong duties of obedience. Yet, as I shall show in Sect. 4, it remains possible for a broadly legitimate regime, such as the Athenian democracy, to issue commands with 'savage' content. Such outcomes raise dilemmas for committed citizens.

'Persuade or obey' relates to political engagement, but of what kind? Socrates abstains from formal political activities except when the law specifically commands them of him (*Apology* 31d-32b). He is nevertheless an active participant of Athenian democracy, spending his days in the agora—the public space where citizens routinely discuss social, ethical, religious, or political issues (*Apology* 31b). Plato's dialogues testify to Socrates' willingness to converse with anyone about topics of political and ethical importance (see e.g. *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Laches*). For Ancient Athenians, politics encompasses the entirety of social interactions, including the proper conduct of citizens, their ethical and civic education, and so forth (e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9). The agora constitutes a forum of public discourse that forms an inextricable component of democracy (See e.g., Heinze 2018; Habermas 1996). For Socrates, to speak with fellow citizens about public issues is as politically relevant as, or perhaps even superior to, participation in any formal political institution

<sup>15</sup> Text accompanying notes 12–13.

<sup>16</sup> Hart's formulation of the fairness argument remains silent on the requirement for democracy. By contrast, according to Simmons, Rawls's insistence on a *voluntary cooperative* enterprise (Rawls 1964: 9, emphasis added), his requirement that benefits and burdens are distributed justly, and his overall support for constitutional democracies suggest that the fair play account assumes a generally democratic system (Simmons 1979: 136–137). Although I do not think that the fairness argument strictly requires a democratic society, it fits with the claim of democratic citizenship proposed here.

<sup>17</sup> On how the duties of fairness are owed to one's fellow citizens see Rawls 1964: 10.

(compare *Apology* 17c-d with 31d-32b). Socrates refrains from formal law-making processes but features prominently in Athenian public life; so absolutely dedicated is he to public matters that he has, throughout his life, neglected his private affairs, a choice which has left him destitute (*Apology*, 31-e, 36b). In this sense, his actions (and, importantly, the freedom he has to engage in them) betoken his civic engagement. Socrates' extra-institutional conduct may be the most effective way for him to participate in democratic government by seeking to persuade his fellow citizens (*Apology* 30e-31a, 31b, 36c). His bleak view of institutional politics articulated in the *Apology* corroborates this position.<sup>18</sup>

The 'persuade or obey' doctrine extends to judicial proceedings as well. In contemporary states, judicial processes are stripped of democratic elements, with the limited exception of citizen juries. Yet in Athens, judicial processes maintain a thoroughly democratic character.<sup>19</sup> Citizens accused of wrongdoing address an assembly of their fellow citizens, whom they attempt to persuade of their innocence. Socrates is in a similar position—if he persuades the jury, he will be acquitted (*Apology* 35c, 38c).<sup>20</sup> The trial's democratic character, it being a process where persuasion can occur, means that Socrates is bound by the outcome. Should Socrates ignore the jury's judgment and escape, far from simply breaching a command, his disobedience would show contempt for democratic processes (*Crito* 51e '[the one who disobeys] neither obeys us nor, if we do something wrong, does he try to persuade us to do better'). Fleeing Athens would illustrate an attempt to substitute a legitimate democratic decision with his individual judgment.

Had Socrates been denied a proper trial, and thus an opportunity to persuade, the Athenian legal system's legitimacy would come under question. We can only speculate how Socrates' duty to obey would change in that case. The Laws, apparently unconcerned with the conviction's substantive injustice, admonish Socrates to direct his grievances against 'men, not the laws' (*Crito* 54c). Athenian laws establish fair judicial processes, but the citizens comprising the jury may reach wrong decisions. Even when procedures are correctly set out, the content of democratic decisions ultimately depends on citizens' opinions and actions. It is by no means a novel idea that just processes may in fact produce substantive injustice sometimes (see e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.10). Legitimate procedures nevertheless beget duties of obedience irrespective of their occasional substantive failures. Socrates' conviction results not from an unjust process but from his fellow citizens' judgment (See e.g., Ober 2002: 183; Todd and Millet 1990).

This flattering depiction of democratic Athens as broadly legitimate and just seems surprising in light of Plato's denunciation of democracy as arbitrary and inherently flawed.<sup>21</sup> Democracy inevitably degenerates, Plato fears, into lawlessness;

<sup>18</sup> It is impossible for someone to participate in formal politics *and* pursue justice, see *Apology* 32a, 32e, 36c ('too honest to survive if I occupied myself with those things').

<sup>19</sup> Athenian juries consisted of a few hundred citizens (two hundred and one, five hundred and one, and so forth). They were therefore much smaller than legislative assemblies, such as the Ecclesia, which consisted of a few thousand citizens (typically about 6000).

<sup>20</sup> On the Athenian legal system in general, see MacDowell (1978: 247–254).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g., *Republic* 6.492b-c (on democracy's corruption), *Republic* 6.496c-d (on the insanity of the masses), *Republic* 8.561d (on democratic citizens' lack of order), *Republic* 6 (democracy's shortcomings, e.g., 499d-500b). For related criticisms see *Apology* 29e-30b (on critique of market-driven individualism and pursuit of luxury), *Apology* 36b (on democracy's factions).

it regresses into ‘ochlocracy’ or mob rule (e.g., *Republic* 8, 563d-e). Contrary to the Laws’ defence of Athenian democracy, Plato sees democratic actions as irrational and savage. In the *Republic*, he scraps democratic rule as inherently unstable and incapable of producing justice consistently (*Republic* 8, 555b-564e).<sup>22</sup> These two contrasting dispositions are mirrored even within the short space of *Crito*. The Laws’ vigorous endorsement of democratic legitimacy contrasts with the haphazard nature of a democratic people Socrates lambasts at an earlier point in his exchange with Crito (*Crito* 44c-d). Addressing this inconsistency, Eric Heinze (2018: 119–120) suggests that Plato’s rejection of democracy in the *Republic* rests on democracy’s failure to attain the standards of legitimacy he defends within his ideal state. By contrast, his aim in *Crito* involves evaluating Athens on its own criteria of legitimacy.

### 3.2 ‘Persuade or Obey’ in Contemporary Politics

I have thus far attributed to *Crito* a model of democratic citizenship constructed around the idea of popular government. Several theories take some form of political participation in popular government to constitute a condition of political legitimacy and advocate active citizenship. Civic republican theories, in particular, frequently draw inspiration from classical models of democracy (see e.g., Arendt 1998). Also Pettit (2012).<sup>23</sup> But models of legitimacy advocated by contemporary theorists differ from that defended by the Laws. The latter depends on self-government exercised within a direct democracy, a stipulation mostly lacking in current theories.

*Crito*’s choice between persuasion and obedience presupposes a sharp distinction between the stages before and after a law is adopted by a direct democracy. Persuasion is restricted to pre-decision-making processes (Brickhouse and Smith 2004: 222; Kraut 1984: 56, 63–64). Up to and including the point at which a proposed action is debated, fully-fledged Athenian citizens may participate in the decision-making process and try to persuade. Once decisions are made, all citizens, irrespective of their personal judgments, interests, or preferences must obey. Although dissent is surely allowed—citizens can debate about the law and even attempt to change it—they must still obey (Brickhouse and Smith 2004: 221). In this context, persuasion is meaningful: it is open for any citizen and can have appreciable impact on political outcomes. But within modern systems, the choice between persuasion and obedience seems contrived. Legislatures vote on many and complex issues, with few constituents likely to agree with their representatives on every vote. The size of modern states means that most citizens can scarcely be heard. The choice between persuasion and obedience nowadays only applies, if at all, to actual representatives.

A state’s institutions largely depend on socio-historical conditions. Direct democracy might have been a suitable instrument for securing broad citizen participation in the milieu of a small ancient polis. Yet current societies with vast populations cannot easily manage direct democracy as a means of securing fair and equal

<sup>22</sup> Plato’s rejection of democracy resonates throughout history. Rancière (2006: 8–9) traces to Plato a hatred for democracy that infects all subsequent philosophers.

<sup>23</sup> Contemporary republicans such as Pettit dissociate their theories from classical ideas of citizenship because of their supposedly irresistible association with positive freedom. But see Brown (2001).

political participation for citizens. Direct democracy is not only practically untenable, especially considering the highly technical character of contemporary legislation, but is also susceptible to majoritarian abuses that threaten vulnerable minority groups (see e.g., Pettit 2012: 188–194; Pettit 1997, ch. 6. Also *Politics*, 4.1292a4–30 (on the tyrannical and oppressive nature of unbridled direct political participation)). How are the criteria of legitimacy found in *Crito*, then, relevant for contemporary societies?<sup>24</sup> If civic participation and democratic citizenship are intelligible only in the extraordinary socio-political context of ancient Athens, then *Crito* offers little guidance for modern states.

We cannot apply *Crito* willy-nilly to modern, vastly and densely populated societies (see e.g., Herrera 1995: 49). Nevertheless, *Crito*'s criteria for legitimacy are adaptable for current regimes. For example, it is plausible to maintain that allowing opportunities for citizens to engage in politics and try to persuade others enhances a regime's legitimacy. Yet references to persuasion cannot simply entail conduct taking place at the pre-decision-making stage. We must extend the formula to allow persuasion to occur in post-decision-making contexts, targeting existing not merely prospective laws. One way is to see mechanisms designed to contest executive and legislative decisions as post hoc attempts at persuasion of fellow citizens and law-makers. Challenging a political decision in court, for example, can be construed as an attempt to persuade others about the unfairness or impropriety of a legitimate decision (or even scrutinise its very legitimacy). As long as contestation remains within legal limits, seeing dissent as attempted persuasion raises few concerns. Even if citizens choose to contest, they typically obey law while their challenge is addressed.

But if formal political processes, including contestation, are too narrow arenas for persuasion to take place, then we can plausibly think of persuasion occurring beyond those forums. For A.D. Woozley (1979: 30–37), we must admit civil disobedience as a means to persuade fellow citizens about a law's injustice. To be sure, *Crito* leaves no room for this reading (Woozley 1979: 37; Herrera 1995: 49). Nor is there reason to assume that had Socrates escaped, his disobedience could have been reconstructed as attempted persuasion. It would be difficult to defend such a claim, considering the absence of an audience to which Socrates would direct his disobedience.

Civil disobedience emerges, nevertheless, as an appropriate way to engage in political activity and therefore persuade others within contemporary broadly democratic regimes. For present purposes, I adopt a broad definition of civil disobedience as non-violent lawbreaking committed with the intention of communicating a political message. Civil disobedience can be direct or indirect: in the first case, dissidents directly disobey the (unjust) law they protest and wish changed, whereas in the second, dissidents breach a law that is perfectly just as a means of challenging another flawed law. Following academic practice, I take both cases of direct and indirect disobedience to involve similar considerations (in both cases dissidents protest some

<sup>24</sup> Several theorists cast doubt on the extent to which one can use ideas developed in such radically different contexts. See e.g., Waldron (2005: 35); MacIntyre (1994: 302–303). But see Saffron and Urbinati (2013: 445); Rancière (2006: 37) (on how problems ancient societies faced (e.g. majoritarianism, political abuse, citizen apathy) still trouble us today).

unjust law, they wish to attract attention to its injustice, they pursue its change and so forth). The central feature of the model of civil disobedience I use here is communicativeness, which embodies the political character of civil disobedience (Rawls 1999: 321; Arendt 1977: 74–76; Brownlee 2012). Addressing their fellow citizens, civil disobedients fulfil a persuasive role. Indeed, for paradigmatic civil disobedient Martin Luther King, this protest is the ‘ultimate form of persuasion’ (King 1986: 484). Indirect democracies, which stress alternative means of citizen engagement beyond direct participation in political institutions, can and ought to recognise the civic potential of suitably constrained lawbreaking in civil disobedience, and facilitate the protest as a tool for political persuasion. A strict reading of the ‘persuade or obey’ formula probably excludes civil disobedience as an option, given that failures to persuade (assuming adequate opportunities to attempt persuasion) must always be followed by adherence to law. But adapting the criterion of persuasion for contemporary contexts inspires an interpretation of civil disobedience as a legitimate form of political activity, a way in which citizens seek to persuade others that the legal system is, in some respects, flawed.

#### 4 Grounds of Disobedience

Socrates is widely considered a great dissident, largely because of his renowned questioning of conventional beliefs. It is to Socrates’ ‘gadfly’ (*oistros*) role (*Apology* 30e) that King (1991: 71) likens his own actions. In contrast to King who deliberately broke the law, however, Socrates opts to obey. If anything, *Crito* seemingly dispels any suggestion that Socrates is willing to break the law. It may appear difficult to see why Socrates is even associated with civil disobedience, especially in light of the term’s modern connotations (Kraut 1984: 76).<sup>25</sup> For C.D. Herrera (1995: 43, 46), the dialogue offers no evidence to suggest that Crito contemplates Socrates breaching the law as a means of attracting his fellow citizens’ attention over his undeserved conviction. Nor is there evidence to suggest that Crito wants to change Athenian laws he deems particularly immoral or otherwise objectionable—the proper subject matter of civil disobedience (but see Socrates’ distaste for the jury’s decision, *Apology* 39c–e). But when read together, *Crito* and the *Apology* help us to identify circumstances under which disobedience becomes justified.

The choice between persuasion and obedience seems at first blush to leave little room for justified disobedience, making *Crito* appear authoritarian (see e.g., Heinze 2018: 121–123; Kraut 1984: 5). Consider an Athenian citizen objecting to a proposed law. The first step is to attempt to persuade his fellow citizens. Participating in the relevant legislative assemblies, he may speak freely. His plea will either be accepted or rejected. If it is accepted, the citizen will presumably accept the

<sup>25</sup> Henry David Thoreau is generally credited with coining the term in his 1849 essay originally entitled ‘Resistance to Civil Government’, reprinted as ‘Civil Disobedience’ in Hugo Bedau’s (1991) seminal collection of essays on civil disobedience, ‘Civil Disobedience in Focus’. *Crito* also appears, by way of introduction, in the same collection.



resulting law. If the plea fails, he must nonetheless obey the result. Some suggest, then, that *Crito* preaches blind obedience to law (See e.g. Taylor 1927: 168; Zinn 1991: 909–910).<sup>26</sup> Scholars adopting such interpretations of *Crito* maintain that it is irreconcilable to the *Apology*. The former advocates a model of strict obedience to law while the latter reveals Socrates' willingness to disobey (Howenstein 2009: 67–73; Olsen 1984). The paradox resolves, I argue, once we move beyond the conventional understanding of *Crito* as supporting ultimate deference to legal authority. I shall show that the duty Socrates perceives as binding him to Athenian law is overridable. The *Apology* complements *Crito* by suggesting circumstances under which citizens may derogate from their general duty to obey. If some disobedience is deemed justified, then it is incorrect to read Socrates' commitment to the law as absolute (Kraut 1984: 11). The next section investigates the examples of justified disobedience found in the *Apology*. I shall then argue that classical liberal accounts of civil disobedience cannot fully accommodate as justified all cases of disobedience envisaged by Plato. By contrast, democratic theories of civil disobedience, which view disobedience as a justified response to systemic, democratic deficits, better accommodate all examples identified in Sect. 4.1.

#### 4.1 The Examples of the *Apology*

In the *Apology*, Socrates defends himself against the charge of impiety brought by his accusers. Addressing a jury, he offers valuable information relating to his attitude towards law. Socrates recalls having promptly disobeyed an unjust command, namely an order issued by the oligarchic regime of the Thirty Tyrants, imposed on Athens after her defeat in the Peloponnesian War. The Tyrants summoned Socrates and asked him to bring in Leon of Salamis, an innocent third party, to be executed (*Apology* 32c). Recounting the events, Socrates insists that his disobedience stemmed from a principled unwillingness to commit injustice (*Apology* 32d). Confronted with a sufficiently unjust command, it appears, one is unbound by the duty to obey, to the extent of that injustice.

One may surely question whether the command of the Thirty Tyrants successfully creates any duties of obedience, considering the regime's illegitimacy (see e.g., Kraut 1984: 18–21). The exclusion of the bulk of the Athenian population from self-government, and the impossibility of persuasion, renders the Tyranny illegitimate. As such, the regime creates no duty to obey. Absent such duty, one might argue, Socrates simply makes a decision based on his own judgment about justice. But this is not how Socrates justifies his action. He does not deride the Tyranny as illegitimate (cf. Woozley 1979: 54). Nothing indicates that Socrates' reason for

<sup>26</sup> Brickhouse and Smith (2004: 219) emphasise elements of the agreement between Socrates and the Laws that indicate that agreement is consistent with only provisional obedience. They argue that the 'obey or persuade' formula, an invitation to citizens to change the content of law, is part of the agreement. Therefore, citizens are given the chance to change the content of their duties of obedience. A requirement of absolute obedience, on this reading, can only be found in despotic, savage, impositions of directives on citizens.

disobedience signalled resistance to the Tyranny's authority. His 'whole concern', he announces before the jury, 'is not to do anything unjust or impious' (*Apology* 32d). The incident reveals Socrates' categorical refusal to commit injustice. So strong is that conviction that Socrates disobeys despite the reasonably foreseeable wrath of the Tyrants (*Apology* 32d-e, 'I might have been put to death for it'). It is plausible to conclude, then, that on at least some occasions the imperative to not commit injustice trumps the duty to obey even a legitimate order.

A passage earlier in the *Apology* is even more telling. Echoing the deferential position detected in *Crito* (*Crito* 51a), Socrates remarks that 'it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one's superior, be that god or man' (*Apology* 29b). This sweeping statement apparently leaves little room for disobedience, lest one be branded shameful and disgraceful. Yet almost immediately, Socrates imagines a scenario that sets limits to obedience:

If you said to me in this regard: "Socrates . . . we acquit you but only on condition that you spend no more time on this investigation and do not practice philosophy, and if you are caught doing this, you will die." If, as I say, you were to acquit me on those terms, I would say to you, "Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god, rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy." (*Apology* 29d)

Socrates would readily disobey a democratic jury's instruction to quit philosophising. His duty to god calls, on the one hand, for his constant philosophising; questioning others, he explains, is in 'service to the god' (*Apology* 22a). Justice demands that Socrates fulfils his divine duty and he continues investigating fellow citizens—a practice conducive to the common good (*Apology* 22a, 23b, 30a. On how the reference to god is truly about justice, see *Apology* 38a). On the other hand, he must abide by a court's legitimate order. The two commitments can pull, however, in opposite directions. Socrates' commitment to justice and philosophy prevails over his duty to abide by the jury's decision, weighty as the latter may be (Brickhouse and Smith 2004: 122–123, 131). Both examples discussed thus far indicate circumstances where Socrates' duty to obey law is overridden by some greater imperative. Disobedience is warranted because of the grave injustice obedience entails.

Socrates' resistance to a proscription of philosophising has typically been read as an example of a divinely ordained task that Socrates must follow irrespective of what the laws demand (see e.g. Howenstein 2009: 59. On the seriousness of *elenchus* and the imperative to pursue it even in light of legal authority, see Vlastos 1991: 134–135). But it also reveals, I argue, a ground for disobedience that does not rely on divine authority. It refutes, therefore, the erroneous suggestion that the *Apology* demands obedience to the state unless god commands one otherwise (Murphy 1979: 41). Philosophising entails for Socrates not merely, or even primarily, subjective cogitation, but above all freedom of expression and participation in the public sphere. *Logos*, translating reason and understanding, is also the Greek word for speech. Far from a product of solitary contemplation, reason is only realised through citizen interaction. Speaking to others is inextricably linked to rational thinking and is inarguably vital for attempts at persuasion. Philosophy is a manifestly communicative activity that requires dialogue with fellow citizens about issues of public concern. It is, therefore, Socrates' avowedly

unconventional yet unquestionably powerful means of participation in Athenian democracy, given his legendary influence in his own time (*Apology* 31d). Rather than engage directly in law-making and attempt persuasion through formal channels, Socrates criticises, questions, and contests received democratic wisdom. Had a decision, even one resulting from established procedures, taken away Socrates' freedom to practise philosophy, it would essentially strip him of his democratic citizenship. Socrates would disobey not because a law takes away his preferred pastime, but because it deprives him of his citizenship; without philosophy, Socrates is no longer a citizen.

For Heinze, outlawing philosophy equals Socrates' disenfranchisement from democracy (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 2004: 232). Philosophy's legitimating function, he argues, rests on it being an instance of expression within public discourse (Heinze 2018: 126). Philosophy is a quintessentially political activity that adduces Socrates' position as a self-governing member of the Athenian democracy. If Athens gains legitimacy by allowing citizens to govern themselves and be politically active in democratic proceedings, then Socrates' exclusion from citizenship delegitimises, *pro tanto*, the Athenian regime. Far from resting on an abstract, quasi-religious duty to philosophise, Socrates' lawbreaking would be justified, in that case, on the basis of the absolute illegitimacy of a decision to exclude someone from self-government.

## 4.2 Anticipating the Democratic Turn of Civil Disobedience

The examples discussed in the preceding section reveal that Socrates' duty to obey is by no means absolute. Moreover, they contribute to our understanding of civil disobedience by revealing circumstances under which citizens are justified to disobey. With reference to those examples, I sketch two sets of circumstances under which disobedience becomes justified. The first refers to the substantive failures of a legitimate law, and the second is associated with failures of legitimacy. Liberal theories of civil disobedience, I suggest, tend to focus on cases falling in the first category. But democratic theories of civil disobedience, which have gained prominence in recent years, can better explain all examples found in Plato's writings.

To begin, a procedurally legitimate directive may command citizens to commit some egregious injustice. Again, Socrates' refusal to turn in Leon is justified in light of the sheer injustice resulting from compliance. In such cases, whatever duty to obey citizens normally incur must be breached to the extent of that injustice.<sup>27</sup> These circumstances have been traditionally associated with conscientious objection. But there is no reason to exclude civil disobedience as a response to similar scenarios. It remains possible for citizens instructed to commit injustice to frame their actions as civil disobedience by emphasising the relevant communicative component (Ceva 2015). Performing civil disobedience, some draftees objecting to the injustice of the Vietnam War publicly burnt their draft notices. What is important for present

<sup>27</sup> For natural law theories that associate a law's legitimacy and its ability to command obedience with its substantive content, unjust laws fail to create moral duties of obedience entirely (See e.g., Aquinas and Thomas 2002). But this position is incompatible with the picture of legitimacy I have sketched throughout this article. *Crito*, I believe, supports the view that even unjust decisions reserve some legitimacy and can therefore lay a claim to one's obedience to the extent that they emanate from appropriate democratic processes.

purposes is that this ground is sufficient for justified civil disobedience. Whether dissidents prefer one mode of protest to another depends on the particular historical, social, and political context.

If the demands of justice can plausibly justify lawbreaking, then why does Socrates choose obedience? Does a commitment to justice compel Socrates' disobedience? For Crito, this is surely the case. It is unjust, Crito contends, to let your enemies harm you (*Crito* 45c, 46a).<sup>28</sup> And although Socrates does not directly address that claim in *Crito*, previous remarks in the *Apology* suggest that he does not consider the death sentence to be a great harm—even if his accusers certainly pursued it as such (*Apology* 30d. Socrates' metaphysical convictions about death prevent him from seeing it as an evil, see *Apology* 29a, 37b, 40b–41c). Socrates asserts that shunning one's duty in order to guard one's life is disgraceful (*Apology* 28b–d).<sup>29</sup> For him to disregard the democratic laws by which he has lived, and which he has cherished perhaps more so than any other Athenian would be unfair and disingenuous (*Crito* 52a–b ('we [the Laws] and the city were congenial to you'). See also Vlastos 1991: 134). Fear of death cannot make Socrates abandon his quest of testing and investigating others. Nor can it make him betray the democratic principles by which he has conducted himself. There is injustice involved in Socrates' death sentence. But that injustice is not associated with Socrates' death per se. It is rather located in the mistaken democratic decision to convict an innocent person. In Socrates' eyes, we might presume, a conviction requiring him to pay a nominal sum would be equally unjust. In his plea at the sentencing stage, the philosopher announces that what he deserves is that he be bestowed appropriate honours for his service to the polis (*Apology* 36b–d). Any form of penalty is undeserved and thus necessarily 'evil' and unjust. This explains why even though the conviction meant his death, what we would ordinarily recognise as the ultimate injustice, Socrates does not consider it adequate ground to derogate from his duty to obey. Suffering the conviction is therefore more preferable than committing the injustice of escaping a democratic decision, especially in light of Socrates' avowed belief that it is more objectionable to commit injustice than to suffer it (*Crito* 49c–d. Cf. *Phaedo* 61c–62b and *Laws* 873c–d. See Howenstein 2009: 61–62).

Academic literature since the end of World War II has largely accepted that legitimate instructions may be permissively disobeyed when they command egregiously unjust conduct. Liberal theories of civil disobedience face little difficulty justifying civil disobedience with reference to a law's substantive injustice. For Rawls (1999: 326), civil disobedience is justified when 'substantial and clear injustice' occurs. This commonly entails some profound violation of citizens' basic liberties. Only laws seriously infringing the basic liberties principle and blatantly violating the fair equality of opportunity principle are unjust enough to justify lawbreaking (Rawls 1999: 326–327). For Ronald Dworkin (1986: 107), in a similar vein, disobedience is justified when a majority acts in violation of the rights of others. It comes as no

<sup>28</sup> In *Republic* 1.335b–e, Polemarchus propounds a similar view of what justice entails (justice requires action to benefit friends and harm enemies).

<sup>29</sup> Socrates repeatedly remarks that he cares little for his own death, especially given his old age, *Apology*, 32c–d.

surprise then that Socrates' position, permitting disobedience in cases when obedience would result in egregious injustice, is generally accepted by contemporary theories of political obligation and civil disobedience.

A second possible occasion for disobedience occurs when a procedurally legitimate directive entails violation of the regime's legitimating conditions. When a procedurally legitimate decision results in diminished opportunities for political engagement for groups or agents, disobedience becomes an appropriate response. Socrates' refusal to abide by a lawful proscription of philosophy would fall under this category. Even if the directive in question produces no severe substantive injustice (or at least not so extensive injustice that would be sufficient to justify derogation from a general duty to obey), lawbreaking remains justified because the directive's content would entail Socrates' exclusion from civic engagement.

A shortcoming of liberal models of civil disobedience is that in the absence of severe and conspicuous injustice, civil disobedience remains more difficult to justify. Such theories likely fall short of allowing disobedience for the second set of circumstances, unless they clearly raise questions of rights-violations. In permitting disobedience for cases in which a regime acts to diminish opportunities for political engagement, and thus acts to reduce its own legitimacy, Plato anticipates the democratic turn of contemporary civil disobedience discourse. For Plato, disobedience in those cases need not necessarily be justified with reference to the substantive injustice produced by the law, or the extent of that injustice. It is justified simply by the fact that the law compromises citizens' opportunities to be politically active. Contemporary democratic theories of civil disobedience seek to shift emphasis to such democratic deficits that justify lawbreaking (Habermas 1985; Celikates 2016; Smith 2013; Markovits 2005). Against the liberal paradigm that limits disobedience to cases of clear and egregious infringements of justice, democratic theorists of civil disobedience maintain that dissidents are morally justified to disobey when agents or discourses are excluded from or marginalised in political processes. When civic engagement is curtailed, resistance is an appropriate response (Celikates 2016: 992; Lefkowitz 2007). Theories of civil disobedience must permit lawbreaking when laws or policies obstruct opportunities of civic engagement, even when these directives are procedurally legitimate and do not explicitly raise questions of profound rights-violations.

Consider, for example, procedurally legitimate efforts to repress the political power of some groups through gerrymandering or other voter suppression laws. Gerrymandering is objectionable to the extent that it blunts the political control individuals or groups can exercise through elections (Weinstock 2016: 715). Such tactics typically secure *formal* protections of basic rights but substantively cut *effective* access to politics for parts of the population. The jury's decision to proscribe philosophy for Socrates resembles the gerrymandering scenario insofar as they both portray instances in which a legitimate decision seeks to strip citizens of some fundamental characteristic of citizenship (in the first case, participating in political discussions in the agora, and in the second voting). Given how liberal theories of civil disobedience have traditionally sought to restrict disobedience to cases of clear and profound violation of basic rights, excluding 'policy questions' or cases of procedural shortcomings that do not entail blatant rights-violations, it seems unlikely that

they would permit civil disobedience in the gerrymandering scenario. Democratic theories of civil disobedience, which stress moral justifications for lawbreaking to address the regime's failures of legitimacy, are better suited to accommodate the gerrymandering scenario.

I do not suggest that liberal theories are always unable to recognise civil disobedience targeting democratic failures. They might be able to do so by linking the procedural failure in question to some substantive violation of basic rights. Yet this indirect approach remains insufficient; violations of basic rights are not always obvious. The inability to justify resistance when individual rights are afforded formal protection but are not, in practice, fully realised, means that the liberal model cannot, in the end, accommodate all the circumstances of resistance the democratic model purports to cover.

## 5 Conclusion

This article explores the existence and limits of a general duty on citizens to obey with reference to Plato's *Crito* and the *Apology*. The democratic claim, encapsulated in the slogan 'persuade or obey', ultimately grounds citizens' general commitment to law. As long as legal systems provide for opportunities for civic engagement and persuasion, they remain legitimate. Being sensitive to the differences between the Athenian democratic system and contemporary democracies, I have suggested that we can extrapolate from *Crito* legitimating criteria that influence the way we view current political systems. Plato's work can therefore illuminate the normative position of modern citizens vis-à-vis their legal systems. It can also help us conceptualise civil disobedience as a mechanism for attempting political persuasion.

*Crito* is frequently associated with an absolute duty to obey but I have shown that this position is incorrect. Far from supporting uncritical submission to authority, *Crito* and the *Apology* invite rigorous testing of a citizen's commitment to a broadly legitimate regime. I have therefore identified two sets of circumstances found in Plato's texts under which disobedience would be permissible within a broadly legitimate regime. First, legitimate laws may engender egregiously unjust outcomes. Second, legitimate laws may obstruct the exercise of democratic citizenship, thus contravening the conditions that render a political system legitimate in the first place.

Liberal models of civil disobedience are unable to accommodate fully both sets of circumstances. Focusing almost exclusively on disobedience as a challenge to the substantive injustice produced by legitimate laws, they neglect disobedience targeting violations of a regime's legitimating conditions. Democratic theories of civil disobedience, by contrast, stress the permissibility of civil disobedience as a response to decisions that diminish or hinder citizens' access to political participation. Such exclusion or marginalisation is frequently subtle and as such may fail to trigger models of civil disobedience focusing on substantive injustice. By permitting disobedience to attempts to diminish one's access to political participation, Plato anticipates the democratic turn of democratic discourses of civil disobedience.

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# Involuntary Wrongdoing and Responsibility in Plato

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Rachana Kamtekar (2017) challenges a narrative about Plato's moral psychology that is fairly well entrenched among English-speaking interpreters of Plato and has been for much of the last half century.<sup>1</sup> According to this narrative, Plato in his early writings—and specifically in the *Protagoras*—presupposes a monistic psychology (on which all motivation, or all effective motivation, is rational or good-dependent) but he later abandons this theory in favour of the pluralistic psychology of the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus*, and *Laws*. This putative development in Plato's psychological theory is supposed to be driven by his changing views on what Kamtekar and others have called “psychological eudaimonism” (roughly that all our actions express our considered rational judgment about what is best), a thesis that rules out the possibility of *akrasia* (knowingly doing what is worse). On this narrative, psychological eudaimonism is the doctrinal core of the “Socratic Intellectualism” to be found, in varying degrees, in pre-*Republic* dialogues, and it is the abandonment of this core Socratic doctrine that makes way for the new pluralistic psychology of the middle and later dialogues. In later Plato we find *rational* eudaimonism, but not *psychological* eudaimonism, at least according to this narrative.

One of Kamtekar's most striking claims in *Plato's Moral Psychology* is that psychological eudaimonism is peculiar to the *Protagoras*, no more a stable commitment in Plato's early period than the hedonism that we also find in that dialogue. Both hedonism and psychological eudaimonism are local to the dialectical context of the *Protagoras*, on Kamtekar's interpretation. Each is invoked as a hypothesis (in the technical sense invoked in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*): psychological eudaimonism is a hypothesis on which virtue would be teachable, and hedonism is a further hypothesis on which psychological eudaimonism would be true. But Platonic hypotheses, as we know from the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, are provisional, to be tested, and may ultimately be rejected. Such is the fate of psychological eudaimonism, on Kamtekar's reading (although I gather the disavowal happens off stage). It is invoked for purely dialectical reasons in the *Protagoras* and never again invoked in other dialogues, since its justification—the higher hypothesis that pleasure is the good—is consistently disavowed by Plato in those other contexts.

Instead of an about-face over the course of Plato's dialogues on the question of psychological eudaimonism and the theory of motivation that stands and falls with it, Kamtekar finds an enduring commitment to a weaker thesis, which she does not label, but that I will call:

<sup>1</sup>An influential early version of that interpretation is defended in detail by Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), updated in *Plato's Ethics* (1995).

NATURAL DESIRE FOR GOOD:

“Human beings have a natural desire for our own good” (= Kamtekar’s (3\*), p. 3)

As I understand Kamtekar’s view, the thesis that there is a natural desire for the good, unlike the thesis of psychological eudaimonism (p. 130), is neutral on the question of whether there are multiple and potentially conflicting sources of motivation in the soul (as long as all such parts are good-directed). Indeed, Kamtekar argues in chapters 4-5 that all three parts of the *Republic*’s tripartite soul are the seat of good-dependent motivations. Since all human motivation is, in Plato’s view, good-dependent, it cannot be the case that he distinguishes between rational and non-rational parts of the soul *in order to* account for the presence of good-independent desires (as on the familiar narrative). Rather, Kamtekar argues, Plato’s point in dividing the soul is to resist what she calls the “de-attribution” of motivations (p. 4, 129-30; 199-200). By de-attribution of motivations she has in mind the claims in the *Gorgias* that tyrants do not want (*bouletai*) to extort and expropriate unjustly (since doing so is bad), and in the *Meno* that people do not desire (*epithumein*) bad things, however assiduously they may pursue objectives that will be their downfall (p. 93-101).<sup>2</sup> To make such disavowals of desire is not to deny that the tyrants or the reckless are motivated to do what they do, but it is to disown the motivation on behalf of the agent (p. 4). I’d like to raise some questions about this de-attribution, and its connection to what often gets called the “Socratic Paradox”, variously expressed as the thesis that being bad or unjust is involuntary, or that performing bad or unjust actions is involuntary:

• no one goes ἐκὼν (voluntarily) towards what he thinks is bad	( <i>Prot.</i> 358c7-d3)
• all who do bad or shameful things, or commit injustice, do so ἄκοντες (involuntarily)	( <i>Prot.</i> 345e3, <i>Gorg.</i> 509e6-7)
• no one is bad or unjust ἐκὼν	( <i>Tim.</i> 86e1-3; <i>Laws</i> 731c1-3,
• all who are bad or unjust are so ἄκοντες	( <i>Laws</i> 734b4, 860d1-2, 860e1)

This cluster of statements is typically taken to comprise a signature doctrine of Socratic intellectualism (= Kamtekar’s (2), p. 1), but as Kamtekar rightly points out (p. 2), it persists throughout the Platonic corpus, even in dialogues that flamboyantly embrace a multipartite soul.<sup>3</sup>

The Socratic paradox, specifically the thesis that doing injustice is involuntary, is the focus of Kamtekar’s third chapter, which is where she also discusses the de-attribution question. The first question I want to raise concerns the relation between de-attribution and the thesis of involuntariness. Although in one introductory comment Kamtekar seems indicate that such de-attributions are a consequence of the thesis of involuntariness,<sup>4</sup> my impression is that the arguments for the thesis of involuntariness and for the de-attribution thesis are hard to distinguish. E.g. in the *Gorgias*, Socrates first argues that tyrants and orators aren’t doing what they want (*ha bouletai*) when they kill and expropriate (468d6-7, Dodds 1959), and only later restates or infers from this that they commit injustice involuntarily:

<sup>2</sup>*Gorgias* 467a; *Meno* 77b-78a.

<sup>3</sup>witness the occurrence of the Socratic Paradox in *Tim.* 86e1-3& *Laws* 731c1-3, *Laws* 734b4, 860d1-2, 860e1 (cited above); with some vestiges in the *Rep* (at least regarding the *mē boulomenon* thesis at 577e, and its mirror image thesis by Glaucon at 359b8, 360c6, 366d1: no one is just/does justice *hekōn*).

<sup>4</sup>“In dialogues before the *Republic*, Plato also uses contrariety to the agent’s natural desire for good to ‘de-attribute’ desires or beliefs from an agent, despite that agent’s avowals...” (Kamtekar, p. 4).

[to Callicles] Do you think Polus and I were or were not correct in being compelled to agree in our previous discussion when we agreed that no one does what's unjust wishing to do so, but that all who do so do it unwillingly (μηδέννα βουλόμενον ἀδικεῖν, ἀλλ' ἄκοντας τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας πάντας ἀδικεῖν)" (Zeyl trans. 2000, 509e2-7; Dodds 1959)

Indeed, this passage is the only place in the Platonic corpus where we have anything approaching an argument offered for any version of the Socratic Paradox. It is a one-premise argument of the form:

1. No one who commits injustice wishes to do so.
2. Therefore, everyone who commits injustice does so involuntarily.

While the premise is not explicitly a de-attribution of wish, such de-attribution may be offered as a gloss on the premise. So my surmise is that de-attribution is like a sidebar to the Socratic Paradox and that Kamtekar's point about Plato's motivation for the partition of the soul is that he continues to endorse the conclusion that wrongdoing is involuntary, but resists de-attribution as a gloss on that doctrine. (Alternatively, I wonder whether de-attribution of motivation is supposed to underwrite a denial of responsibility for the action one performs μὴ βουλόμενον—in which case perhaps Kamtekar does, after all, take the involuntariness of wrongdoing to entail its de-attribution, since she takes the Socratic Paradox to entail that no one is responsible for their wrongdoing (p. 106-111).

Before discussing the involuntary wrongdoing any further, let me comment on the vocabulary in which the Socratic Paradox is expressed. I am using 'involuntary' to translate the Greek adjective ἄκων, which Kamtekar typically translates 'unwilling', but also sometimes as 'unintentional' – a variation that is perfectly reasonable given the range of usage in 5<sup>th</sup> and 4th century Greek, where the distinction between acting ἐκὼν and ἄκων sometimes corresponds to what we would characterize as the distinction between willing and unwilling behavior,<sup>5</sup> and sometimes between what I would call intentional and unintentional behavior.<sup>6</sup>

The conception of involuntary action as unintentional gives rise to the notion that actions due to ignorance are involuntary—a criterion for involuntariness famously invoked by Aristotle (EN 1110a1). Kamtekar claims that this is not the criterion that Plato has in mind when he asserts the involuntariness of injustice. Rather, she claims, he has in mind the conception of involuntariness as unwillingness – which involves contrariety to desire. In particular, she argues, Plato has in mind contrariety to the fundamental human desire for the good invoked the thesis of Natural Desire for the Good. To the extent that ignorance plays a role in the involuntariness of injustice, it may explain how the injustice came to be,

<sup>5</sup>For example, when the reluctant messenger delivers bad news to Creon ἄκων (Sophocles, *Antigone* 274-7), and when Inachus expels his daughter, Io, ἄκων, because otherwise Zeus has threatened to destroy his entire progeny (Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, p. 663-72). I discuss these and other examples in Meyer (1993, p. 10-11).

<sup>6</sup>For example, when Oedipus claims he killed his father and married his mother ἄκων on the grounds that he did not realize he was doing this (Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 964 ff). One might say that such cases are also "against the grain," as in the previous category, but there are also clear uses of ἐκὼν for reluctant but intentional behavior, as when the besieged Plataeans surrender ἐκόντες to the Spartans after running out of food (Thucydides, 3.58.2-3).

but “being due to ignorance” is not constitutive of justice’s involuntariness. This at any rate is what Kamtekar claims for the involuntariness invoked in the Socratic Paradox, but I’m not sure how broad a claim she wants to make to this effect, since she also invokes texts from sophistic authors, poets, and tragedians on which she denies that ignorance is a sufficient (or at any rate constitutive) condition of involuntariness (p. 74–80). I don’t think it is plausible to claim that there are no uses of the term in which ignorance suffices to make an action involuntary (ἄκων),<sup>7</sup> even if this is so for Plato’s use of the term.

Here it is useful to consider a text in the *Apology*, rightly flagged by Kamtekar (p. 71–73), in which Socrates claims that if (counterfactually) his behaviour did corrupt the youth of Athens, he would be corrupting them involuntarily (ἄκων διαφθείρω, 26a2). Kamtekar initially introduces this text to push back against the assumption that Plato takes actions due to ignorance to be involuntary (= R3, p. 70). She makes the brilliant observation about the passage that the only ignorance Socrates explicitly invokes here is ignorance that is evidence for *voluntariness*, not for involuntariness: it is his accusers who must suppose—in alleging that he corrupts the youth ἐκόντα (25d7)—that he fails to realize that in so doing he risks harm to himself (25e1–5). Kamtekar’s immediate point is that only certain kinds of ignorance can be involuntary-making, for Plato. Later on in the chapter, however, Kamtekar does acknowledge that this passage in the *Apology* appeals to an epistemic criterion for involuntariness (p. 110). Socrates is claiming that if he corrupts the youth, he does not do so knowingly, and therefore does not do so voluntarily.

At this later point in the chapter (p. 107–110), Kamtekar is discussing a passage in *Laws* IX where Plato’s Athenian confronts the problem of how to construct a penal code that is consistent with the Socratic Paradox (860d–861a). If being unjust is involuntary, he argues, then so is performing unjust acts (860d); but this, he claims, entails that there are no involuntary acts of injustice—a result that conflicts with the ordinary legislative practice of distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary ἁδικήματα (861b). The Athenian’s solution (861e–862c) is to distinguish between acts of injustice and acts of harming. To commit injustice (ἀδικεῖν) is to harm someone, and harming (βλάπτειν) can be both voluntary and involuntary (even if committing injustice is always involuntary). Reading this distinction back into the *Apology*, we are to suppose that Socrates is claiming that even if he corrupted [i.e. harmed] the youth, he did not know he was harming them, and so he harmed them involuntarily.

So Kamtekar’s point, I gather, is not that Plato never recognizes ignorance as a criterion of involuntariness, but that this is not the criterion he has in mind in the Socratic Paradox. Where the Socratic Paradox is at stake, she claims, injustice is diagnosed as involuntary on the ground that it frustrates our natural desire for the good.

Now, one might be inclined to push back here, and insist that one kind of ignorance IS crucially involved in the Socratic Paradox. It is not the ignorance of particular matters of fact, which is relevant in judicial contexts, where questions of accountability and punishment are at stake: such as ignorance that the philosophical conversation is harmful to the souls of Athenian youth. Rather, it is ignorance of good and bad. We commit injustice, in spite of our natural desire for the good, because we mistakenly think it is good. Now I expect that Kamtekar will be quite happy to agree here on Plato’s behalf: yes, we commit injustice *because* we are ignorant of the good. But, she will continue, that is to *explain* how injustice comes about (an efficient causal question); if we want to say what *makes* injustice involuntary (a formal causal question), we have to point to the fact that injustice contravenes and frustrates our fundamental desire for the good.<sup>8</sup> I think Kamtekar is right on this point; in insisting that injustice

<sup>7</sup>Against the proposal by Rickert (1989), that all examples in this category can be reduced to the category of the unwilling, see my *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility* (1993, p. 15 n16).

<sup>8</sup>I here invoke two of the four causes Aristotle distinguishes in *Physics* 2.3: the efficient cause of X is what produces X, while the formal cause of X is what makes X what it is.

is involuntary, Plato is not simply or primarily explaining how injustice comes to be, but rather insisting that is contrary to our interests and our deepest desires.<sup>9</sup>

Now I want to raise some questions about the relation between voluntariness and responsibility. In forensic contexts, the efficient causal history of an action is crucial, and a verdict of involuntariness serves to excuse or mitigate responsibility. The type of ignorance that is involuntary-making in such contexts, however, is not the ignorance of the good, but ignorance of particular matters of fact—another point famously made by Aristotle (*EN* 1110b28–1111a19): ignorance that the gun is loaded is exculpatory, but a mistaken belief that firing into a crowded nightclub is a fine thing to do is not exculpatory. Since Plato takes involuntary wrongdoing to be explained by ignorance of the good, one might expect that the relevant kind of involuntariness is *not* exculpatory. But that is not the way Kamtekar reads Plato; she thinks the Platonic thesis that wrongdoing is involuntary entails that people are not responsible for the acts of injustice that they commit.

Kamtekar addresses the connection between voluntariness and responsibility in the context of the *Republic* and *Timaeus*. *A propos* the Myth of Er in *Republic* X, she notes that those who choose bad lives are deemed responsible (in the famous phrase, αἰτία ἐλονένου, 617e4–5) but worries that this is problematic in light of the doctrine that their bad actions are involuntary (p. 106).<sup>10</sup> She further proposes (p. 106–7) that Plato betrays awareness of this problem in *Timaeus* 86b–87b, where he claims that the “involuntary evils” of both body and soul are due not to the unhappy person to whom they belong, but to bad parents and bodily humours. In this passage we are told that people are not to be blamed for being bad. Thus we find a straightforward argument from (1) “vice is involuntary” (in the sense of contrary to our deepest interests) to (2) “people are not responsible for being vicious” to (3) “people should not be blamed for being vicious.”<sup>11</sup> But even here I am skeptical: the *Timaeus* passage concerns the involuntariness of bodily and psychic states (vices of body and soul), and makes no claims about the involuntariness of actions.<sup>12</sup>

Where Plato’s speakers do unambiguously affirm the Socratic Paradox of actions (not just of states of soul and body), they fail to draw the parallel inference: that is, from the thesis that (1’) all wrong doing is involuntary, they do not infer that (2’) we are not responsible for, or should not be blamed for, our wrongdoing or our bad actions, still less (3) that we should be exempt from blame or punishment for them. In the *Laws* IX passage mentioned earlier, the Athenian does infer the involuntariness of committing injustice from the involuntariness of being unjust,<sup>13</sup> but he betrays no interest in exempting those who commit injustice involuntarily from accountability for their actions. The language of responsibility is notably absent from the passage. Still, in carving out a category of “voluntary harming” he makes it possible for all the usual remedies of the law and other practices of accountability to apply.

Similarly in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, where Socrates affirms that wrongdoing is involuntary (*unwilling* in the sense that Kamtekar rightly stresses), he shows no interest in exempting the wrongdoer from responsibility, blame, or punishment. Indeed the *Gorgias* elaborates at great length the

<sup>9</sup>This for example, has to be what the expression “most involuntary” (ἀκουσιώτατα) means in *Timaeus* 87b4 (discussed by Kamtekar, p. 106–7). I defend this interpretation in Meyer (2014, p. 55–69, 66).

<sup>10</sup>Although it is worth noting that there is no mention of the Socratic Paradox in the context of the myth of Er, and the question of responsibility seems to be for the life as a whole, especially the benefits and burdens it contains, not individual actions in a life.

<sup>11</sup>But these remarks don’t strike me as “recognizing the problem” (p. 106) that Kamtekar finds in the *Republic*, rather than as providing material by which we might raise an objection to Plato.

<sup>12</sup>I defend this interpretation in Meyer (2014, p. 61–68).

<sup>13</sup>via the obscure principle “that it can never make sense for something voluntary to be done involuntarily” (ἀκουσίως δὲ ἐκούσιον οὐκ ἔχει πράττεσθαι ποτε λόγον, 860d6–7; modified Schofield/Griffith translation), which has nothing to do with responsibility.



benefits of punishment.<sup>14</sup> The Socratic Paradox is deployed in the *Gorgias* to convince Polus and Callicles that they should exert themselves to acquire knowledge of the good (not to convince them that bad people are not responsible for their actions). The *Protagoras* too is in the protreptic business of advocating the pursuit of knowledge, not the forensic business of shielding wrongdoers from accountability.

On my reading of the Socratic Paradox, the upshot is that we should cultivate knowledge, not that we should escape blame or punishment for our wrongdoing. Kamtekar, by contrast, concludes her chapter on the Socratic Paradox on the opposite note, raising worries about the propriety of divine punishment for misdeeds that the Socratic Paradox classifies as involuntary, and suggesting that the problem might be solved if divine punishment can be construed as a cure (p. 111). Let me close with the observation that, at least in the *Laws*, Plato does not seem to share her worry, or adopt her solution. In the account of cosmic justice in *Laws* X, there is no mention of the Socratic Paradox, and the Athenian is remarkably clear-eyed about the point of cosmic rewards and punishments. Virtue benefits and vice harms (904b1-3): postmortem relocation of good souls to better places and bad souls to worse places has the purpose of delivering “victory to virtue and defeat to vice” (904b3-5). This sounds like punishment rather than cure.

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<sup>14</sup>Admittedly this discussion offers a prospective, or teleological, account of punishment, rather than the kind of retrospective assessment for which responsibility would be relevant; however, in the larger scheme of the dialogue, it is part of Socrates' insistence that Polus and Gorgias are mistaken about what is good and bad: they are mistaken in thinking that committing injustice can make a life εὐδαίμων, and mistaken in thinking punishment is a harm to be avoided rather than a benefit to be sought.

## SELF-MOTION AND COGNITION: PLATO'S THEORY OF THE SOUL

DOUGLAS R. CAMPBELL

**ABSTRACT:** I argue that Plato believes that the soul must be both the principle of motion and the subject of cognition because it moves things specifically by means of its thoughts. I begin by arguing that the soul moves things by means of such acts as examination and deliberation and that this view is developed in response to Anaxagoras. I then argue that every kind of soul enjoys a kind of cognition, with even plant souls having a form of Aristotelian discrimination (*krisis*), and that there is therefore no completely unintelligent, evil soul in the cosmos that can explain disorderly motions; as a result, the soul is not the principle of all motion but only motion in the cosmos after it has been ordered by the Demiurge.

“Soul” is said in many ways across its eleven-hundred-and-forty-three uses in the Platonic corpus. It is the principle of both life and self-motion. It is the seat of cognition. It is also the bearer of moral properties. While there has been a lot of attention in recent years given to Plato’s *moral* psychology and the tripartite theory of soul, it is not clear at all just what the soul is or how its various roles and identities fit with each other. Scholars have, in

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fact, charged Plato's theory of the soul with incoherence.<sup>1</sup> For he frequently oscillates between different conceptions of the soul. The *Phaedo* is the principal example: in one argument for the immortality of the soul, the soul is the principle of life; in another, it is the mind.

We can see this feature of the soul elsewhere. For example, in *Republic* I, Plato writes<sup>2</sup>:

Is there any function of the soul that you could not accomplish with anything else, such as taking care of something (*epimeleisthai*), ruling, and deliberating, and other such things? Could we correctly assign these things to anything besides the soul, and say that they are characteristic (*idia*) of it?

No, to nothing else.

What about living? Will we deny that this is a function of the soul?

That absolutely is.<sup>3</sup>

He is moving almost reflexively from the soul as a reasoning thing to the soul as a principle of life. Making sense of these different strands of thought is an ancient worry: Plutarch, for instance, points to a debate between Crantor and his followers, on the one hand, who thought that cognition and judgment were the chief functions of the soul, and Xenocrates, on the other hand, who thought self-motion was its principal operation.<sup>4</sup> Further,

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<sup>1</sup> Here are some scholars who level this accusation: Broadie (2001, 301–2) says that “readers of the *Phaedo* sometimes take Plato to task for confusing soul as mind or that which thinks, with soul as that which animates the body” and argues that the unity of the Platonic soul is what the *Phaedo* is trying to show. Frede (1978, 38) laments that “as to the exact nature of the soul we are left somehow in the dark by Plato in the *Phaedo* and also in *Republic* X” and believes that the problem is not solvable. Solmsen (1955, 154–55) finds such a narrow conception of the soul in the dialogues that he thinks Plato has “no room for” many of the soul’s functions and they are treated “rather like strangers at the gate than children of the house.” Long (2005, 173) charges Plato’s psychology with “incoherence” but does try to save it by saying that souls are *persons* and personhood provides unity. Trabattoni (2007, 307–8) says of the attempt to find in the dialogues a unified theory of the soul: “il risultato di questo metodo, tuttavia, somiglia pochissimo ad una *theory*, e molto più a una farraginoso dossografia, irta di incongruenze e di contraddizioni.” Crombie (1962, 301) complains that there are multiple “forces which pull upon the word *psuchē* as Plato employs it.” Fronterotta (2014) is concerned with the same problem.

<sup>2</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations here are my own. I have consulted the translations listed in the references: for the Presocratics, see Barnes (1979) and Dumont (1988); for Plato, see Burnet (1922), Cooper (1999), Gallop (1975), Hackforth (1952), Mayhew (2008), and Rowe (1986; 1993); for Aristotle, see Aristotle (2016), Barnes (1984), and Ross (1951; 1956; 1961).

<sup>3</sup> *Republic* I 353d.

<sup>4</sup> See Plutarch (1976, 1012–13).

when Aristotle reports where his predecessors stood on the soul, he divides them into “those who regarded the ensouled in relation to motion” and “those who regarded the ensouled in relation to knowledge and perception of the things that are” (*De Anima* I.2 404b7–9). This reflects the debate that Plutarch observed: two different ways of thinking about the soul.

Here, I understand cognition tentatively as the capacity for *nous* and *doxa*. Plant souls will complicate this picture below. Moreover, understanding why the soul has cognition will, in fact, go a long way to seeing why the soul is the subject of other, familiar psychological phenomena such as love and hatred. Occasionally I shall use the word “thought,” but I have in mind something weaker and more expansive than what “thought” or “intelligence” often connotes, namely, the long list of activities identified in the *Laws* passage (896e–897a) to which we shall turn shortly: wish, examination, deliberation, and so on. These are the motions with which the soul moves things.<sup>5</sup>

Along these lines, I argue that to be the sort of mover Plato thinks that the soul is, it must have cognition.<sup>6</sup> I then argue that every kind of soul cognizes, although in the case of plant souls, Plato means something so weak and thin that it is akin to what Aristotle calls discrimination (*krisis*). I conclude by arguing that there is no evil, completely unintelligent soul in the cosmos and that the soul is, in fact, a principle of motion in the cosmos only after the cosmos has been ordered by the Demiurge. The possibility of an evil soul is raised most prominently in *Laws* X, where Plato asks which soul is in charge of Heaven: “one wise and full of virtue, or one that possesses neither” (*to phronimon kai aretēs plerēs ē to mēdetera kektēmenon*) (897c)<sup>7</sup>? Whether even plants have *to phronimon* (“an intelligent part”) is treated in section 3. The debate comes down to whether every soul has *to phronimon*,

<sup>5</sup> The capaciousness of this category (such that it includes, as we shall see, belief and deliberation) is due to the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in Plato, which I discuss toward the end of section 1.

<sup>6</sup> Johansen (2004, 138ff) distinguishes between so-called kinetic and cognitive readings of the soul in the *Timaeus*, after pointing out the same debate between Crantor and Xenocrates that I have above. He argues that there is no need to choose between these different readings because the “point of the composition of the soul is to show how the soul moves when it thinks and thinks when it moves.” In a sense, this paper expands upon this interpretation (and focuses much more on the *Laws* than on the *Timaeus*’s account of the soul’s composition). However, I also argue that the soul’s cognition is a *necessary condition* for the sort of motion for which the soul is responsible; from the point of view of interpreting the soul’s composition (which Johansen 2004 is interested in), we might agree that cognition and motion are equally important, but if it were not for the soul’s cognitive capacities in general, it would not be capable of being a source of order in the cosmos, which, I argue, is key.

<sup>7</sup> “Evil and completely unintelligent” is how I describe the latter soul.

and I answer in the affirmative. This article concerns features that are common to *every* soul.

This view enables us to better appreciate the importance of Plato's psychology in the history of thought. Plato is innovating when he unites the soul as the principle of cognition with its status as the principle of life; for there appears to be nobody before him who united them.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the soul hardly appears even in Plato's own (so-called) early dialogues, which some scholars have explained by saying that Plato did not at the time know how to unite the soul's aspects.<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, the *Laws* furnishes us with the clearest statement of how to unite these aspects, but it is too hasty to conclude that Plato did not have at least the makings of the answer before this point. The *Phaedo*'s oscillation between different conceptions of the soul suggests that he did. No matter when he solved the problem, we should see this as a watershed moment in ancient psychology: the moment when two longstanding aspects of *psuchē* were united.<sup>10</sup>

## 1. SELF-MOTION AND COGNITION

The starting point of a solution to the problem is to see that when Plato describes the soul as the source of motion, he does not mean motion in an unqualified sense. The motions in question require cognition. It is for this reason that the soul must also be a knower. Consider that in the *Phaedrus*, Plato initially presents the soul as the source of mere motion, and while this might at first seem to include both unintelligent and intelligent motions, he later clarifies what he means: "all soul takes care of the soulless" (246b). Taking-care (*epimeleisthai*) presumably requires some intelligence, but the

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<sup>8</sup> The only apparent exception is a passage from Antiphon, in which the jury is asked to punish a murderer by depriving him of the "*psuchē* that planned the crime" (*Tetralogies* 14a7; translation in Claus 1981, 141 n. 3). I agree with Claus (1981) that we should not overstate the rationality involved in the criminal act: the murderer in question was, in fact, drunk, and thus his behavior was not *that* rational.

<sup>9</sup> Socrates in the *Crito* alludes to the soul when he mentions the part of us that has justice or injustice inside it, but he does not name it (47e–48a). Perhaps this passage and the uncertainty expressed in the *Apology* regarding the afterlife support the interpretation that Plato had to work out his psychology over his career. Claus (1981) says so; an even earlier statement of this approach to the soul is from Rohde (1921, 266–67), who said that "es scheint, dass die höchste Vorstellung von Wesen und Würde, Herkunft und über alles Zeitmaass hinaus sich in die Ewigkeit erstreckender Bestimmung der Seele Plato erst gewann, als die grosse Wendung seiner Philosophie sich vollendete."

<sup>10</sup> We continue to see this united conception of the soul throughout the history of philosophy, even if some of the underlying Platonic foundational details change. See, for instance, Solmsen (1971) on Aristotle's argument that living things are not self-movers at all.

passage in *Laws* X where Plato describes exactly how the soul moves the cosmos is decisive:

Soul drives (*agei*) all things in heaven, on Earth, and in the sea, by means of its own motions, which go by the names of wish, examination, taking-care, deliberation, true and false belief, joy, grief, courage, fear, love, hatred, and all the prime-working (*protourgoi*) motions akin to these that take over (*paralambanousai*) the secondary-working motions of bodies, such as increase, decrease, separation, combination, and those that follow these, such as heat, cold, roughness, smoothness, white, black, bitter, and sweet, all of which the soul uses, when it both cooperates with divine understanding [*noun*] and guides everything, as a true deity, happily and correctly, or when it pairs with the lack of understanding [*anoia(i)*], it brings about the opposite.<sup>11</sup>

This passage is not exclusively about the world-soul. For false belief is attributed to soul here, and it is not possible for the world-soul to get anything wrong.<sup>12</sup> Also, that no particular soul is referenced here is indicated by the absence of any article before *psuchē*: he is speaking generally about the function of soul as such. Moreover, there is no sense in the *Timaeus* that the world-soul moves *everything*, but this passage is about how soul drives *all things* (*panta*). Our own souls move their local corner of the cosmos through the motions listed there.<sup>13</sup>

The difficulty of identifying *which* soul Plato is talking about is shared by the *Phaedrus*'s passage concerning soul taking care of the soulless (246b). There, too, no article is present: *pasa psuchē*. On this basis, it seems that *Plato is talking about a common feature of souls*: namely, they move things (in the *Laws*) and take care of things (in the *Phaedrus*).<sup>14</sup> For we are not given any reason to think that any given soul moves *everything* in the *Laws*, and indeed, we cannot attribute every motion from the *Laws* passage, such as false belief, to

<sup>11</sup> *Laws* X 896e–897b.

<sup>12</sup> The *Timaeus* cannot explain why the world-soul's rationality would sometimes fail. Its creation from the purest mixture seems to preclude that, and moreover, Plato characterizes the world-soul's intelligent life as *ceaseless* (*apausatos*), whereas it seems that having a false belief would require some kind of cessation of intelligence (36e). Further, there is no reason to think that Plato imagines the world-soul as capable of love, fear, and the other phenomena attributed to soul here.

<sup>13</sup> However, I am not claiming that the passage refers to *only* human souls. Carone (1994, 283) mistakenly thinks that if we do not believe Plato is talking about the world-soul, then he is talking about only human souls. She explains that "if it is *just* the human souls that Plato is speaking of here, it is hard to understand why he says of them that only they 'rule everything in heaven, earth and sea' (896e) or, as Plato will say afterwards, are 'in control of heaven and earth and the whole revolution' (897b)."

<sup>14</sup> See Blyth (1997, 186) for a defense of this interpretation of the *Phaedrus*'s psychology. He argues that the *Phaedrus*' argument from self-motion concerns not any particular soul (or kind of soul) but instead "some common aspect of all living things." See also Bett (1986).

the world-soul in any case. The reader of the *Phaedrus* comes to the *Laws* already knowing that taking-care was one way that the soul moved the world, but Plato thinks that the *Laws*' much richer set of mental phenomena, including taking-care, is required to explain why the world is the way that it is. We should take seriously that the list of prime-working motions is incomplete: there are further unnamed motions that are also responsible for the world's order. These motions are responsible for the world's order specifically by *taking over* the motions of bodies and guiding them by means of *nous* toward the right end. This discussion of *taking over* (*paralambanein*) is the specification of a mechanism by which the soul promotes the desired outcome.

This helps us see why Plato thinks that the soul is the subject of so many disparate activities. Corcilius (2015, 24) discusses what he calls Plato's "psychological" conception of the soul: the picture of the soul as the subject of "various mental actions and affections." He believes that Plato "at no point argues for his psychological conception of the soul." However, it seems that *Laws* X 896e–897a is the crux of such an argument. Plato thinks that we could not explain why the world is ordered as it is, which is the *explicandum* of *Laws* X, without attributing to the soul a rich set of activities, including even joy, false beliefs, and love.

Furthermore, unintelligent motions are caused by the soul only indirectly. In the first place, the soul is responsible only for activities that require some kind of cognitive life. It is important that Plato says that these are the soul's *own* (*autēs*) motions. He is stressing that while the soul is indirectly responsible for the other motions, it is the direct cause of only the so-called "prime-working" ones. The final account, then, is that the soul moves things with its thoughts, generally speaking, and then these motions cause things to increase or decrease, and so on, in accordance with the soul's designs, and then bodies acquire the properties Plato mentioned, such as heat and roughness, and more. Dillon (2009, 349) says that nowhere in the corpus does Plato specify an "influence, mechanism or device" by which the soul moves bodies, and even when we consider the *Laws* in particular, although the soul is the source of motion, we never learn by what means it is able to move things. However, the *Laws* is designed to answer this question: it is by means of the souls' intelligent motions that bodies are moved.

Plato's decision to combine the principle of self-motion and cognition turns on two related Platonic motifs. The first is that, construed roughly and broadly, the person with the relevant knowledge is the appropriate one to oversee some activity. This is present throughout the whole corpus: for example, at *Crito* 48a, where Socrates says we should listen only to those who understand justice, not the ignorant many. Its strongest expression is



in Plato's political philosophy: specifically, consider his belief that only someone with knowledge will have a model in his or her soul to look to when ruling (e.g., *Republic* VI 500c–d). The strong conclusion is that an ignorant person “cannot establish conventions about what is beautiful, just, and good here, if they need to be established, and protect and preserve them” (*Republic* VI 484d). This concerns our present subject, because when Plato considers how orderly the world is, he infers that it was ordered by someone with knowledge (*Laws* X 897b–d).<sup>15</sup> The inference relies on an implicit premise that resembles 484d: *only* someone with knowledge can be productive of the sort of order that we see in the cosmos. Therefore, the entities responsible for it are intelligent. Moreover, 897b–d makes it more evident that souls have *circular motion* in particular. Since circular motion is the motion of *nous*, and souls are movers by means of intelligent activities, then souls are movers by means of circular motions.

The second motif here explains why souls can cognize the Forms in particular. Theoretical wisdom is required to carry out even ostensibly completely practical activities such as deliberation.<sup>16</sup> Deliberating well requires knowledge of the Forms. It should not be lost on us that deliberation is listed as one of the motions by which the soul moves the world in the *Laws*. Consider again the *Republic*, where he says that it is only after contemplating, and becoming like, the Forms that the philosopher can rule the ideal city (VI 500–1). *Timaeus* 28b–29b has a complicated argument to eliminate the possibility that the Demiurge looked at anything other than the Forms when crafting the world.<sup>17</sup> The *Statesman* divides all knowledge into two kinds: one is practical and the other theoretical (*gnōstikē*) (258e). The theoretical knowledge again divides into two kinds, one of which is authoritative (*epitaktikon*) (260b). Those with authoritative knowledge give orders to others

<sup>15</sup> “Orderliness” is a broad term that picks up on several related ideas from *Laws* X. There, the motions that govern the cosmos are said to be uniform (*hōsautōs*) and regular (*kata ta auta*) (898b). Plato contrasts them with motions from an entirely unintelligent source, which move in an unbalanced (*manikōs*) and disorganized (*ataktōs*) way (897d). This notion of orderliness is not teleological; however, later in the *Laws* X, and throughout the *Timaeus*, Plato does argue that the motions governing the cosmos are directed toward a certain end.

<sup>16</sup> While Plato does see theoretical and practical knowledge as distinct kinds, one supports the other. Olfert (2017, 26) finds this connection between the two even in dialogues where the Forms are absent: for example, in the *Protagoras*, she gleans that “the art of measurement does not only motivate our actions, and does not merely determine what it is correct (best, most pleasant) for us to do, or what it is true that we should do. It also directs us to act knowledgeably and thereby to let knowledge and truth rule our lives.” This picture of theoretical reason explains why Plato imbues the soul with it, even though the explanatory role of soul cosmologically is a productive one.

<sup>17</sup> Johansen (2014) is a helpful study of this argument.

and *do* things with their knowledge that those with the other sort, judgment-making knowledge, do not.<sup>18</sup> We should think of how Plato views the motions of the soul in *Laws* X as *productive* of combination, separation, and so on. He even describes the former as *prime-working*.

## 2. PLATO AND HIS PREDECESSORS

This picture lets us appreciate Plato's engagement with his predecessors. I shall illustrate this with only Anaxagoras, for the sake of brevity. Socrates in the *Phaedo* explains what he finds appealing about Anaxagoras's view of *nous*: *nous* is "what arranges and is the cause of all things" (97c). However, Anaxagoras lets Socrates down when he neither makes any use of *nous* in his account nor gives it any role in the management of things; instead, air, water, and other unintelligent things have control (98b–c). While there are many dimensions of Plato's criticism of Anaxagoras, including what a *cause* is, we should understand this as at least the charge that there is an insufficient connection between *nous*'s noetic activities and its status as a principle of motion. Anaxagoras does see *nous* as "self-ruling" and as having "knowledge about all things" (fr. 12).<sup>19</sup> Yet, when he begins to describe how *nous* "initiates motion," he describes only a rotational movement that divides and separates things off (fr. 13).<sup>20</sup>

Anaxagoras says that *nous* "controls" (*kratei*) everything that "has life" (*ekhei psychēn*) (fr. 12). He seems to always cash out the idea of *controlling* in terms of a rotational movement. This view is similar to Plato's.<sup>21</sup> In both

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<sup>18</sup> Plato also says that the statesman can occupy his place as a ruler in virtue of his *understanding* (*sunesis*) (*Statesman* 259c). As well, it is in virtue of *the reasoning part's wisdom* and ability to have forethought on behalf of the other parts of the soul that it is fit to rule (*Republic* IV 441c). This idea was clearly important to Plato.

<sup>19</sup> All translations of Anaxagoras are my own, using the Greek text provided by Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (1983, 362–63).

<sup>20</sup> There is a debate over whether *nous* merely begins the motion or whether it sustains it eternally. Rhodes (2017, 14ff) is the most recent defender of the latter view; Betegh (2004, 209) and Curd (2008, 236) defend the former. As for how the motion is caused, Rhodes (2017, 8) argues that Anaxagoras is committed to the principle that motion is caused whenever two unlike things meet. *Nous*, being pure and unmixed, is different enough from the mixture of everything else that motion is guaranteed by the meeting of the two.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Aristotle notices the similarity too (*De Anima* I.2 404a25–27). Carter (2019, 172) argues that Aristotle objects to Plato's representation of Anaxagoras: on his reading, Aristotle presents Anaxagoras's *nous* as an unmoved mover, causing beauty and order (despite Plato's claims in the *Phaedo* that Anaxagoras does this insufficiently), and that it is Plato himself who has failed to identify why it is best for the cosmos to be as it is (*DA* 1.3 407b9–11). Carter (2019) also interestingly argues that Aristotle believes that Anaxagoras failed to distinguish between *nous* and soul, which, as discussed in the main text shortly, I believe is the opposite of Plato's reception of him: Anaxagoras has not tightly enough connected *nous* and soul.

cases, the first motion is circular, and in both cases, the source of that motion is responsible for only one kind of motion, which then initiates other kinds. For Plato, soul at first creates the prime-working motions, which generate then the secondary-working motions, which in turn generate heat, cold, and so on. Given this, Plato is justifiably disappointed that Anaxagoras made no use of *nous* as such at all (*Phaedo* 98b–c). At *Laws* 896e, he writes that soul moves all things by means of its *own* motion, and those motions are intelligent ones. We should take this as stressing a connection between intelligence, the initiation of motion, and the soul. This is in contrast to Anaxagoras's view, on which the rotation might as well have been initiated by anything at all: there is no reason why it should have been caused by *nous* in particular. Anaxagoras's theories are such that *nous* does no explanatory work, despite the promises made in the early part of his book, or, at any rate, that is the substance of Plato's criticism, rectified later in his own cosmology.<sup>22</sup>

Further, it seems to matter greatly to Plato that *nous* does not merely control the soul but that the soul is the only thing in which *nous* can come to be. This view is repeated in the *Philebus* (30c), *Timaeus* (30b), and *Sophist* (249a). The *Timaeus* passage is particularly telling, for it contains the explanation of why the world is ensouled in the first place: if the world did not have a soul, *nous* could not have come to be inside it. The Demiurge knows that the world needs *nous* in order to be as good as it can be, but the world-body is not able to contain it; therefore, the Demiurge creates the world-soul (30a–c). This is another way of getting at Plato's complaint that Anaxagoras did not tightly connect *nous* and the soul.<sup>23</sup> In Anaxagoras's fragments, we do find, perhaps at most, an anticipation of the central feature of Plato's theory, an identity between thought and a kind of motion, but what we do not find is the soul as the thing which unites them.

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<sup>22</sup> I qualify this thought thus because it is difficult to prove that Anaxagoras really *did* exclusively rely on mechanistic explanations. We catch glimpses of a more involved cosmic *nous* attributed to Anaxagoras at *Cratylus* 413c. Skemp (1942, 33–34) argues that Anaxagoras and his followers had gained a bad reputation in Athens, seen in the *Apology* (26c–d), and this reception is behind the view that he “[resorted] to mechanistic explanations alone.” See Carter (2019) for Aristotle's readings of Anaxagoras, which differ greatly from the *Phaedo*'s. If this is right, then we still see Plato constructing his own theories of the soul and *nous*, albeit not against what Anaxagoras really believed.

<sup>23</sup> However, I do not think that, for Plato, *nous* is required to exist in a soul if it is to exist at all. When *nous* comes to be, it can come to be only in a soul, but it can *exist* outside a soul. See Menn (1995) for a defense.

## 3. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOUL

When we think of the unity of Plato's theory of the soul, there is not just the unity of the soul's different functions to be considered, but also the question of what constitutes the unity among the different kinds of souls that exist. Here, I do not mean the *parts* of a soul, which Plato does sometimes call *eidē*, but instead the world-soul, human and animal souls, and plant souls. Specifically, I shall argue that every kind of soul enjoys a form of cognition, although the world-soul and plant souls enjoy it differently from human souls.

Plato is not the first person to think that the world has a soul. Anaximenes, for example, said that "just as our soul, which is air, dominates us, so too breath and air surround the whole world" (DK 13B2).<sup>24</sup> In the same way that air, our soul, relates to our body, so too does it relate to the world. There is some evidence, moreover, that Plato sees himself as working in a world-soul tradition. Socrates asks Hermogenes in the *Cratylus*: "Do you not believe Anaxagoras that *nous* and soul order and maintain the nature of all other things?" (400a). The activity of ordering and maintaining described here is attributed by Plato ultimately to the world-soul. Karfik (2014) argues that there is similar evidence pertaining to Empedocles. He argues that when Plato says that the Demiurge bestowed love (*philia*) on the world's body (*Timaeus* 32b–c), he is referring to Empedocles. In the *Statesman*, when Plato rejects the view that opposing motions in the cosmos can be explained by a pair of gods whose thoughts are contrary to other (270a), Karfik (2014) also discerns a reference to Empedocles's pair of love and strife.

Plato is, however, critical of this tradition. This *Statesman* passage is a rejection of the Empedoclean theory, even if Plato does think that *philia* has a place in the *Timaeus*. We have considered above Plato's criticism of Anaxagoras. Moreover, if Plato were aware of Anaximenes's theory that the psychic substance, air, stands in the same relation to the cosmos that it does to humans, then it would be this claim that he would target most forcefully. For he thinks that there are meaningful differences between the world-soul and human souls. There is, as Gerson (1990, 77) points out, the obvious fact that human souls cannot govern the universe. Plato thinks that the world-soul is deprived of every motion except for circular motion (*Timaeus* 34a). The world-soul cognizes sensible objects differently from how we do. For the world-soul can indeed have a true grasp of sensible objects, but Plato signals that it is not capable of *sensation*: he uses deliberately the phrase *peri*

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<sup>24</sup> This translation is by Laks and Most (2016).

to *aisthēton* ("concerning a sensible object") instead of *aisthēsis* (37b).<sup>25</sup> The world, of course, has no sensory organs, which is another indication that its experience of sensation must be different from ours (33c).

However, Plato believes that the world is ensouled for the same sorts of reasons that he thinks human beings have souls; the same kinds of phenomena need to be explained. When the Demiurge weaves the soul into the body of the world, it then begins its "intelligent life" (*emphrōn bios*) (36e). Plato has in mind the rotation of the cosmos around its axis, which goes through the center of the Earth. We know that there is a world-soul because the whole cosmos moves in an orderly way, and orderly self-motion cannot be explained in any other way. It matters that the only thing that *nous* can come to be in is a soul, which figures heavily into the earlier parts of the *Timaeus*'s story of the world's creation (e.g., 30b). In fact, Plato thinks that the world has *nous* because of its regular, circular motions around the Earth. No motion besides circular self-motion is available to the world-soul. Humans and animals have cognition too, but theirs is different from the world's.

The difference is reflected in the composition of human and animal souls. They are made of the same ingredients as the world-soul—Being, the Same, and the Difference—but this mixture is less pure (*akēratos*) (41d). It is not clear which differences between the world and humans this explains. I assume that it explains, at least, why the world-soul's cognition is more efficacious than ours: specifically, the world's thought can move the whole world. Human thought accomplishes much less than that. Since Plato thinks that animals are reincarnated humans, they share the same kinds of soul; the world-soul is excluded from the cycle of reincarnation since its soul is so far from being like ours, whereas animals presumably do not have an active rational kind of soul.<sup>26</sup> As well, of course, there is only one world-body, and the world-soul never leaves it, which rules out its exclusion from the cycle of reincarnation.

The lower gods in the *Timaeus* pay close attention to creating a body for us that, as much as possible, protects our reason; so, perhaps the reason why, say, shellfish and birds do not have an active reason is that their body simply is not right for it. As for differences between the world and humans, Brisson (1994, 416) thinks that the purity is the *only* difference between the world-soul and human souls, but this is not obvious. For example, humans

<sup>25</sup> Reydam-Schils (1997, 263) also notes that since there is nothing outside the world-body (32c–33b; 34b), it could not get knowledge of sensible objects from outside it.

<sup>26</sup> This recalls a criticism of the theory of reincarnation in *De Anima*: the theory implies that any soul can, in principle, end up in any body; yet, Aristotle thinks that bodies and souls are perfectly fitted to each other, and so a Pythagorean, for example, seems to be saying something as incoherent as "carpentry could be clothed in flutes" (I.3 407b20–26).

are often irrational, but the world is not.<sup>27</sup> Plato *does* provide an account of the origin of human irrationality, but he locates it in sensation (43a–44d). Sensation violently disrupts the rotation of the circles of the same and different, and it renders us irrational until we begin to do astronomy and philosophy to restore order in the soul. This could never happen to the world-soul, simply because it lacks sense organs and thus cognizes sensible objects differently. It might be that the lower grade of purity in our souls makes us especially vulnerable to these disruptions, but it is never clear just *what* the impurities consist in or are meant to explain.<sup>28</sup>

It is required for reincarnation that the souls in animal bodies are the same in kind as those in human bodies. Carpenter (2008) has argued persuasively that this means that, in principle, there are few differences between animals and human beings; at a minimum, their life projects can be described similarly as attempts to restore their souls' natural orders. Yet, just as the world-soul is excluded from the cycle of reincarnation, so too are plant souls excluded.<sup>29</sup> This reflects an important feature of plant souls: they are deprived of three cognitive capacities. Here is how Plato describes the inner lives of plants: "[the type of soul that they have] does not share in opinion (*doxa*), reasoning (*logismos*), or *nous*, but it does share in both pleasant and painful sensation, with desires" (77b). However, the *Timaeus* earlier says that sensation occurs when a disturbance passes through the sense organs and reaches to *phronimon* (64b).<sup>30</sup> Sometimes the phrase is translated

<sup>27</sup> Cornford (1937, 209–10) argues, in fact, that the world-soul *is* partly irrational, for reasons we shall consider in the following section.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson (1970, 85) adopts this view: "[the mixture of the ingredients] of the human soul is less pure in the sense, perhaps, that its rational judgments can be clouded and perverted by that irrational element with which it is inevitably associated while living an embodied existence."

<sup>29</sup> Exactly how far down the cycle of reincarnation extends is unclear. In the *Timaeus*, the lowest level is occupied by shellfish (92b–c). Meanwhile, in the *Phaedo*, it seems that some people are reincarnated as bees or ants (82b). Either way, in no dialogue does Plato suggest that the cycle extends as far down as plants; given how different plant souls are from other souls, as we shall see shortly, there are good reasons for excluding them. As for how high up the cycle extends, Broadie (2016, 161–62) argues that for a world, "metempsychosis to a new body is impossible" because the world's body will never die. That is right, but we must also mention there is no other world that could be incarnated (33a).

<sup>30</sup> Sensation is also attributed to the mortal kinds of soul, so we might have the same question about them too (cf. *Timaeus* 69d). This fact about the mortal kinds is important in the discussion of the liver and the way that the kinds of soul in a human interact with each other. For instance, at *Tim* 70e–71e, Plato describes images that appear on the liver that the appetites (apparently) perceive and respond to with fear. It is hard to know how to make sense of the appetites perceiving things. See Lorenz (2011, 256), who defends Plato by saying that there is a fire internal to our body that can detect these sorts of changes on the surface of the liver.

in this context as “the center of consciousness” or “the organ of intelligence,” but at a minimum, it means something like *the intelligent part*.<sup>31</sup> Plato usually uses the term to refer to the rational kind of soul (e.g., *Republic* VI 530c, IX 586d, X 604e; *Laws* VIII 837c, X 897b), but there is no way that plants can have the same reason as humans.<sup>32</sup>

The cognition enjoyed by plants is just enough to let them do the two tasks Plato attributes to them: have sensation and have desires. He lacks the vocabulary to precisely name this idea, but we shall see that it resembles Aristotelian discrimination (*krisis*). Plants are responsive to what is good for them about their environment: they grow in good environments and wilt in bad ones. Think of a plant whose leaves stretch and turn toward sunlight and whose roots grow to reach water. A sensitivity to what is good or bad could easily be thought to underlie this behavior, especially to someone who believes that plants have sensations and desires. What is even more remarkable is that plants are able to respond *successfully* to what is good for them—they get it right.

So, there are two considerations to accommodate when identifying what plant cognition is like. The first is that plants successfully respond to what is good for them. The second is that Plato attributes to them desire and sensation in the same dialogue where sensation is explained as involving *to phronimon*. Aristotelian *discrimination* fits well here: plants can discriminate between what is good for them and bad for them, and then respond accordingly. The part of plant souls that corresponds to *to phronimon* in other souls is responsible for this activity. Aristotle describes discrimination as an activity that is of perceptible objects and that moves us depending on what is discriminated; for instance, the sweet moves us differently from the bitter (*De Anima* III.2 427a1–3). Moreover, discriminations are neither true nor false in the propositional sense, which fits with Plato's view that plant souls lack *doxa*.

It does seem that Plato's theory of sensation requires thinking that plants *do* contain *to phronimon*, but I suspect that this is true only in a metaphorical, imprecise sense. The imprecision is required by the fluidity and imprecision of Plato's own cognitive vocabulary. A focus on the explanandum—successful responsiveness to what is good—makes it otiose to attribute to plants any form of cognition more robust than the weak, minimal Aristotelian *krisis*. There is just no further explanatory power added by saying that plants have *to phronimon* in the full sense that humans do, which preserves its

<sup>31</sup> See Brisson (1997, 159–60) for a brief discussion of *to phronimon* in sensation.

<sup>32</sup> This, after all, is how *phronēsis* is described in the *Phaedo* (79d).



etymological connection to *phronēsis*.<sup>33</sup> That possibility is made more implausible by the explicit statement that plant souls lack *nous*, *doxa*, and *logismos*. This *krisis*, which Plato can only gesture at with his vocabulary, is responsible for the orderly, well-oriented motions of plants, and that is the chief takeaway as far as this study is concerned: plant souls produce orderly motions in virtue of their form of cognition, as weak as it is.<sup>34</sup> We might find that, in practice, animal cognition functions the same way. I have argued above that animals have the same kind of soul as humans but that their bodies account for the differences in cognition; since their *nous* is dormant or otherwise inactive, they might rely on the same kind of cognition as plants. If so, then only human sensation is characterized by the functioning of *to phronimon*, but animals and plants still differ in the sense that plants do not even have *to phronimon*, whereas animals have it but cannot use it on account of their bodies.

In sum, every soul has cognition. Plant souls have it as the *krisis* that makes their flourishing possible: responsiveness to what is good and bad for them that explains why plant leaves turn toward the sunlight, for example. The world-soul has intelligence that underlies cosmological facts. Meanwhile, human and animal souls have the same kind of intelligence as the world-soul; humans, at any rate, are capable of the same array of mental activities,

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<sup>33</sup> Consider Carpenter's (2010, 296) argument: "*if to phronimon* retains its connection to *phronēsis*, so that its proper place is among the 'thinking'-terms, with *nous*, *epistēmē*, *dianoian*, and so on; and *if* the process of a bodily change causing a sensation to arise goes via this *phronimon*; and *if* plants have sensation—*then*, plants have a *phronimon*, and so are intelligent, in some sense."

<sup>34</sup> It might be tempting to explain plant behavior differently. We might imagine that plants inherit the world-soul's intelligence, or that plants just straightforwardly belong to the world-body and so are ensouled in some way along with it. This view is taken by Carpenter (2010, 300), who argues that plant intelligence is derivative: plants do not have their own intelligence; specifically, "their sensation does indeed occur, like all sensation, in virtue of some intelligence—but it is the intelligence of the world-soul, and not their own." There are a few considerations that count against this proposal. Firstly, plants are invented by the lower gods at an entirely different, much later step in the cosmogony than the world-soul and world-body (77a). (In fact, plants are invented by the lower gods, whereas the world is invented by the Demiurge.) Secondly, each plant pursues its own good and competes with other plants in order to flourish; this is not the behavior of something being directed by a hivemind. Thirdly, if plants were parasitic on the world-soul, then it would not be clear why Plato bothers to introduce the concept of plant souls at all. Lastly, the proposal overstates the cosmological function of the world-soul. Plato infers that the world has a soul for one reason: it moves itself. Specifically, it rotates on an axis that passes through the Earth. After it has been created by the Demiurge, it nearly drops out of the *Timaeus* completely, only reappearing later on (e.g., 89e–90d) as the model our souls should aspire to be like. For this reason, it is giving too much responsibility to the world-soul to be the source of intelligence in other things, when, in fact, it is the source of motion in the world (and its own cognition exists just to facilitate the orderliness of that motion).

such as deliberation and examination, although ours are less efficacious. The possibility of a completely unintelligent soul is the subject of the next section. The view that there exists a completely evil soul is an ancient and venerable one, which is worth considering since it possibly undermines my interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. THE SOUL IS NOT THE CAUSE OF DISORDERLY MOTION

The existence of a completely unintelligent soul is hypothesized in *Laws* X (897ff) after the discussants conclude that *some* soul is in charge of the cosmos; they then wonder whether it is a soul with virtue and intelligence or an unintelligent, evil soul. The discussants agree in the end that the soul that drives the cosmos is intelligent since the cosmos is so well-ordered. However, it is an open and urgent question just how to explain the existence of disorderly motions. Plutarch, in order to answer this question, in *On the Generation of the Soul in Plato's Timaeus* says that there really is an evil soul (cf. 1016C–D). To a certain extent, we can answer the same question as Plutarch without taking his step: Plato says in *Laws* X that since the soul is the cause of all things (*tōn pantōn*), it must be “the cause of the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly, the just, and the unjust, and every pair of opposites” (896d). It makes sense for human souls to be, say, imperfectly just and to, therefore, be responsible for imperfectly orderly things.

However, saying that human souls are responsible for imperfectly orderly things does not solve the whole of the problem. For there exist multiple passages in the corpus where Plato describes a *completely* disorderly motion that no soul could possibly explain. For example, the receptacle changes properties with no order whatsoever: “it moves back and forth inconsistently while oscillating” (*Timaeus* 52e). Cornford (1937, 209) explains this by pointing to some irrationality in the world-soul.<sup>36</sup> This explanation has two shortcomings. One is that there is no way that the world-soul could produce something *entirely* disorderly. The second is that these motions are *pre-cosmic*

<sup>35</sup> I do not have much to say here about the mortal kinds of soul, but since the argument throughout this article has stressed that it is by means of the soul's intelligence that it acts as a mover, I point to Karfik (2005), who argues that the mortal kinds of soul are motions initiated by the rational kind of soul. Specifically, Karfik (2005, 214) says: “to put the whole as simply and as briefly as possible, the ‘mortal kind’ of soul or the ‘mortal parts’ of it are but specific movements of specific tissues [in the human body], both arising from the immortal soul and acting upon it. There is no mortal soul apart from the body of a living being nor is there any substrate of it other than the bodily tissues of an organism.”

<sup>36</sup> Morrow (1950, 162–63) similarly claims that “the disorderly motions upon which intelligence works are due to the irrational parts of the world soul.”

in the sense that they are happening before the Demiurge has even discovered matter, so to speak: they exist “before the world was organized and came to be out of them” (53a). In fact, God responds to the disorderly motions by adding number to them (53b). So, there is no way that the world-soul could be responsible for this, even if somehow irrationality were present in it. The difficult explicandum is not the imperfectly orderly motion we observe nowadays, but the thoroughly disorderly motion that no human soul *could* be responsible for. Plato does not think that such motion exists anymore, but it existed only pre-cosmically.

We return to Plutarch’s suggestion that there is a distinct evil soul that is responsible for this motion.<sup>37</sup> In his view, the evil soul is not created by the Demiurge but instead predates his ordering of the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> The world-soul is the result of the Demiurge ordering the evil soul (1014B–E). However, Plato does not describe the creation of the world-soul this way at all: there is no sense that it comes to be out of a pre-existing soul. Nor is there an ungenerated evil god.<sup>39</sup> For there is yet another dialogue where disorderly motions are discussed, namely, the *Statesman*; there, Plato does rule out the possibility that an evil god or soul is responsible.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes God moves the universe in one direction circularly, but at other times, he lets it go, and it revolves backward spontaneously (*automaton*) (269c–d). Plato rejects the following explanations explicitly: “we must not say that the universe turns itself, nor in general that it is turned by god in two opposed rotations, nor that some two gods who think in a way opposed to each other turn the cosmos” (269e–270a). Plato thinks that there is one god responsible for the motions of the world.

The conclusion I draw is that the soul is not the source of all motion, despite the claims in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* that it is. In fact, the soul is just

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<sup>37</sup> Plutarch (1976) himself: “unsubject to generation is said of the soul that before the generation of the universe keeps all things in disorderly and jangling motion” (see *On the Generation of the Soul in Plato’s Timaeus*, 1016C).

<sup>38</sup> There is nothing to recommend the view that the evil soul is created by the Demiurge. It seems impossible, since it would have to have been the first thing created by the Demiurge to make sense of the order of events. Plus, there is no discernible reason why the Demiurge would decide to create a purely evil soul, given that he wanted everything to be as much like himself as possible (29e). Further, disorderly motion in the cosmos is exactly what the Demiurge set out to correct, so his creative acts would be the pre-emptive undoing of the product of something he himself created (30a).

<sup>39</sup> It is important to bear in mind the textual support against this possibility, for frequently scholars leave the door open to dualism in Plato’s system. For example, Carone (1994, 286) says that “[Plato] does not dismiss the existence of a kind of evil soul as such,” but instead has argued just that the amount of order in the universe is decisive evidence that the evil soul does not drive the world.

<sup>40</sup> The presence of the disorderly motions in other dialogues rules out that they are somehow a mythical feature of *Timaeus*’s account, peculiar to that dialogue.

the source of all motion in the ordered world *qua* orderly. The data above are impossible to square with the claim that there is a soul responsible even for any completely disorderly motion. Moreover, we should bring to bear the fruits of the earlier parts of this paper: soul moves things with its thoughts. It is hard to see how any of Plato's statements about the sorts of motions soul is responsible for could fit with completely disorderly motions. The view that the soul is not the source of all motion has been off the table since Cherniss (1944; 1954) attacked it, after Vlastos (1939) defended something like it.<sup>41</sup> Everyone who wants to avoid claiming that Plato contradicts himself must abandon some part of the text. Cherniss (1954, 28) explains the disorderly motions as an unintended consequence of the ordering of the world: "demiurgic action again indirectly sets up in other phenomena another series of motions that are neither intelligent nor purposive, but accidental, random, and erratic." Yet, the text of the *Timaeus* reads that the disorderly motions predate any desire on God's part to order things. Further, the text of the *Statesman* reads that there is no other ungenerated god who is responsible for the backward motions. Lastly, Cherniss' account does not even explain the phenomena, for surely if the disorderly motions were even indirectly caused by God, then they would not be *entirely* disorderly, but that is how they are described.

It is easier to abandon the claim that the soul is the principle of *all* motion for a range of reasons. It is normal for both English- and Greek-speakers to make a universally quantified claim over an implicitly limited domain. This is happening in the contexts of the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*. In the former, we are told first that the soul is the source of motion (245d), but then when the reader learns how the soul does this, we are told that soul takes care of all things (246b), and that Zeus, for example, who either is or has a soul, takes care of and orders (*diakosmeō*) all things. We have already discussed *Laws* 896e–897a, where souls move things by means of intelligent activities.<sup>42</sup> In both cases, it seems that Plato is naturally limiting the scope

<sup>41</sup> Cherniss (1944, 362) says that "Vlastos, seeking agreement between the *Laws* and a literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*, has to insist . . . that where in the former Plato calls soul the principle of all motion he is not to be understood as meaning literally 'all' (!)."

<sup>42</sup> I follow Vlastos (1939, 82) when he says: "forget the *Timaios* altogether for a moment. How much could Plato mean when he says that the soul is the cause of all becoming and perishing? At its face-value this asserts that the soul is itself the cause of the instability of becoming; that apart from soul reality would be untroubled by transience. But this is grotesquely unPlatonic. When Plato does ask himself, 'Is soul more akin to being or becoming?', he can only answer, 'It is in every way more like being' (*Phaidon* 79e). The one thing he cannot mean in the *Laws* is that soul is the source of Heracleitan flux." More weight is added to Vlastos's position when we recall that soul's cognitive capacities are its kinetic capacities; the affinity with being, the Forms, makes it able to function as a mover.

of the claim that the soul is the source of all motions.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Aristotle reports that Plato only “sometimes [*eniotē*]” says that the soul is the source of motion (*Metaphysics* 12.6 1072a2), lending more credibility to the view that it is so only in the ordered world.<sup>44</sup>

I cannot decisively settle here the question of what causes these pre-cosmic disorderly motions, if not the soul. However, the text suggests an answer: in some way, it is matter or necessity (*anankē*).<sup>45</sup> The *Statesman* says that the backward motion was “inborn [*emphuton*] in the world from necessity,” as opposed to being caused by God or gods (269d). A lot of time has been spent in this paper spelling out the activities by which the soul moves the cosmos; for there to be another source of motion seems to require an account of how that second source could move things, especially when necessity is devoid of any intelligence. Yet, no such explanation seems forthcoming from Plato’s texts, and there is a good reason for that. If necessity had a regular, coherent way to cause motion, its motions would be regular and coherent, too; however, the chaos is so disorderly that it does not even have any stable properties *at all*. Perhaps this is why Plato does not bother to speculate as to how necessity causes the disorderly motions.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Mohr (1980, 42) argues against the view here on the grounds that “nowhere does Plato explicitly state the ἀρχὴ κινήσεως doctrine applies only to the ordered world. And yet one would expect that if Plato had meant to limit the scope of the doctrine, he would have made some mention of it.” In contrast, I am arguing that the scope of the doctrine is limited implicitly by the contexts of the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* and think it is natural that when someone says “all,” he or she does not mean *all*.

<sup>44</sup> Consult Cherniss (1944) and Gerson (2014) for why Cherniss would not accept Aristotle’s testimony as evidence.

<sup>45</sup> Many scholars describe a *material* principle of evil, usually picking up on a brief mention of the bodily element (*to sōmatoides*) of the world in the *Statesman*’s myth (273b–c), such as Herter (1957) and Nightingale (1996). Sesemann (, 174) argues that there is a commitment to a material principle of evil that Plato has inherited from the Pythagoreans. However, I follow Wood (2009, 362–79) in thinking that there is nothing strictly *evil* about the bodily and that the real problem is the *disorder* (which is not bodily at all). See Mason (2006) for a study of what necessity is in the *Timaeus*.

<sup>46</sup> An anonymous reviewer for *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* raises a difficult point. Since the receptacle is not moved by an evil soul, it is self-moving, but that which is self-moving is eternal (cf. *Phaedrus* 245c–246a and Blyth 1997), from which it follows that the receptacle is eternal (and moves eternally, since its motions are caused by itself, which means that it is always moving). I do take it that the receptacle’s motions exist even now—but not that its motions are perfectly disorderly, as they were pre-cosmically. The *Timaeus*’s descriptions of the way that *nous* persuades necessity implies that the motions of necessity have been guided or directed by *nous*; indeed, Plato speaks this way at 46e when he says that those things that produce disorderly effects without *nous* go on to produce what is beautiful and good when not deserted by it. This idea recurs at the central passage of *Laws* X, when Plato describes the motions of soul (such as wish and examination) as taking over (*paralambanein*) and guiding the motions of bodies (896e–897b). For this reason, I conclude that the motions of the receptacle are preserved yet transformed by *nous* and that they do exist eternally, as we would expect from a self-mover.

## 5. CONCLUSION: THE SOUL'S COSMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Both the *Statesman* and *Tīmaeus* passages above describe the world when God is absent from it. In the latter, God “took over the visible, which was not at rest but was in discordant and disorderly motion” (30a), and this chaos “exists apart from God” in its natural state (53b).<sup>47</sup> This helps us see the way that soul features in this picture and in Plato’s cosmology overall, because while God is the principal cause of order in the cosmos, he eventually retires and leaves the generated souls in charge.<sup>48</sup> God’s absence would leave Plato with a world of pure indefiniteness, if there were no souls. We might be tempted to point to the *Philebus*’s view that objects are compounds of limit and the unlimited. God adds limit to things. At *Tīmaeus* 53b, he resolves the pre-cosmic chaos by adding numbers to it; beforehand, everything was *alogōs* and *ametriōs*. God’s act gives things intelligible properties.

God’s retirement from ordering the world leaves the lower gods and then souls with this job. The retirement is indicated after he has assigned tasks to the lower gods and is said to have “proceeded to stay at home in his customary attitude (*en tō(i) heatou kata tropon ēthēi*)” (42e). This is why in the *Laws* it is the soul that moves things with its thought, which then creates other motions, which in turn give objects their properties, such as bitter, cold, and so on. Since bestowing properties on things is a matter of adding numbers or definiteness to them, then it becomes all the clearer why the soul would have to be capable of some intelligence in order to accomplish this, and this is why Plato envisions the soul as both a knower and a mover. This is something even *we* humans do, as *Laws* X 896e–897a says, through our cognition as well as our love, fear, hatred, and so on. That this is our *cosmic* responsibility is what the Athenian tries to impress on the atheist: the god, identified here as our king (*hēmōn ho basileus*), “devised where to place each of the parts [of the cosmos] such that virtue would win and vice would lose most easily and completely throughout the whole universe. For this purpose he has arranged which sorts of positions, in which sorts of regions, should be assigned to which soul based on its character; but he left the causes of the coming-to-be of any sort of character to the will of each of us [*taīs boulēsesin hekastōn hēmōn*]” (904b–c). God has a purpose for the whole cosmos

<sup>47</sup> Brisson (2003, 200–1) discusses this point, arguing specifically that Plato is alleging that his predecessors focused exclusively on necessity, such that this “is the picture of the sensible universe to which his predecessors’ explanations should lead. There, only material changes are taken into consideration, with intention being left to one side.”

<sup>48</sup> Broadie (2016, 169–70) discusses the “retirement-motif” too.

that we are a part of. We are one of the parts that have been arranged such that virtue wins, and God has left to our wills how things play out exactly.

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